REMEMBRANCE SUNDAY

16 million - the number of military and civilian casualties in the First World War. This is the 100th anniversary of the end of the First World War. We also remember all who died in the Second World War and in all the conflicts since.

In the face of such unimaginable numbers, one seeks something personal and individual. You like me will have family memory. My visit to the attic yesterday produced this.

Captain Arthur Cyril Bateman MC of the Royal Army Medical Corps.

He died in the last week of the war – around the same time as the poet Wilfred Owen whose words we heard a few moments ago – words also read by Michael Palin at the Festival of Remembrance last night.

He was awarded the Military Cross, the citation reads:

*For conspicuous gallantry in repeatedly going round the front line and attending to the wounded who had been lying out for two days. Although continually exposed to hostile sniping and machine-gun fire, he displayed the utmost devotion to duty, and disregard of danger’*

This was my great uncle.

Last Sunday, I was preaching in the Cathedral in Enniskillen where I spent my childhood. Today marks the 21st Anniversary of the Remembrance Day bombing there – the ultimate disrespecting of this solemn moment. REMEMBER BLOG

Alison and I lived, worked, brought up our children during the Troubles in Northern Ireland. 700 soldiers and 319 police died among the 3500 deaths in the NI Troubles – died preserving a veneer of normality within which we could live.

To make it personal and particular again, I think today of Neil Turkington, an Officer in the Gurkas, who died in Afghanistan in 2010. I preached at his funeral for I knew him well. He was a good friend of our youngest child. I shall never forget the almost whispered commands of the Gurka Guard of Honour and the applause of the people in the street.

It goes full circle – for one of the drivers of conflict in Northern Ireland is the loss of 5500 of the Ulster Division killed, wounded or missing in the first two days of the Battle of the Somme – began 1st July, 1916.

That figure seared itself into the collective memory – I remember a lady in my parish pointing to where four small cottages had stood – and saying that the Telegraph Boy came to each one of those cottages in one day.

I took a look at the recruiting posters for WW1 – of which the most famous was the image of Lord Kitchener pointing and saying, ‘Your Country Needs You’. They were direct and straightforward – an appeal to patriotism and service.

And alongside them, we read Wilfred Owen who speaks in his Anthem for Doomed Youth what the reality was like:

*‘What passing bells for these who die as cattle?*

*Only the monstrous anger of the guns*

*Only the stuttering rifles’ rapid rattle*

*Can patter out their hasty orisons.’*

And of course the world did not learn. For the 20th century in particular may have known peace in Europe in its second half – but there has been very little time when there have not been wars and the sacrifice of young lives.

*The pallor of girl’s brows shall be their pall*

*Their flowers the tenderness of patient minds*

*And each slow dusk a drawing down of blinds*

Our faith today speaks of sacrifice – ‘Greater love has no man than this – that a man lay down his life for his friends’ – and links all sacrifice to the death of Jesus on the Cross.

Faith also offers hope and promise. We heard of hope and promise this morning from St Paul:

‘*The trumpet shall sound and the dead shall be raised …*

Today people of faith and of no faith share in mourning with respect and thankfulness the loss of a generation – and of all who have died, been wounded or bereaved in the conflicts since.

Yet faith speaks determination and defiance – speaks of the overwhelming of death and loss – overwhelming it with the love and the power of God – the resurrection power of Christ

And of course the greatest fruit of that in the midst of anger, hatred and despair we should sow seeds of hope, healing and reconciliation