

Armistice Day: Revelation 7.9-end



*I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills: from whence cometh my help?
My help cometh even from the Lord, who hath made heaven and earth. (Psalm 121)*

Those words are engraved on the window of the tiny church of St Olaf in Wasdale Head. It's the smallest parish church in England, surrounded by the great fells at the heart of the Lake District: Scafell and Scafell Pike, Great Gable and Lingmell, Whin Rigg and Illgill Head. We were there a couple of weeks ago, and they were busy getting ready for what should be their busiest service of the year on Remembrance Sunday. In normal times, there would be a couple of hundred people on the summit of Great Gable for the annual service of Remembrance — though they were planning to do something quieter this year in the churchyard down below. What they did in the end I don't know — but the memorial in the churchyard is a poignant reminder that the fells themselves were donated to the people of this country in memory of the climbers who lost their lives in the 1914-18 war. Somehow it seems a fitting way to remember them — not by the sound of "bugles in sad shires", but by the life they celebrated and died for — the life of wind and cloud and sunshine, of running water and rock and heather. The hills provide a framework to anchor the spirit and save it from being swamped in the day-to-day struggle of mud and tears.



John's vision of the worship of heaven provides that kind of anchor. In times of tribulation, when the foundations of the earth seem to be shaking, John reminds us of the eternal truths of God's kingdom. It's precisely when the regularity and stability of the world as we know it is under threat that we need to hold onto that heavenly vision — a vision that reminds us that there is a plan, that there will be a time when God's kingdom will be restored — a time when war and terror will be no more, when spears and guns will be hammered into ploughshares, a time to rebuild shattered lives and to heal the wounds of a broken and divided world. A time when hurts will be healed, and tears will be wiped away, and a reunited humanity will join with a restored creation in a great hymn of praise to the Lamb who sits on the throne: *for the Lamb at the centre of the throne will be their shepherd, and he will guide them to springs of the water of life, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.*



So here's a poem by 'Anon' for today (from *Speak to the Hills: An Anthology of Twentieth-Century British and Irish Mountain Poetry*, ed. Hamish Brown and Martyn Berry, Aberdeen University Press, 1985).

I will go back to the hills again
That are sisters to the sea,
The bare hills, the brown hills,
That stand eternally.
And their strength shall be my strength,
And their joy my joy shall be.

I will go back to the hills again
To the hills I knew of old,
To the fells that bear the straight larch woods
To keep their farms from cold;
For I know that when the springtime comes
The whin will be breaking gold.

There are no hills like the Wasdale hills
When Spring comes up the dale,
Nor any woods like the larch woods
Where the primroses blow pale;
And the shadows flicker quiet-wise
On the stark ridge of Back Sail.

I have been up and down the world
To the Earth's either end,
And left my heart in a field in France
Beside my truest friend,
And joy goes over, but love endures,
And the hills, unto the end.

I will go back to the hills again
When the day's work is done,
And set my hands against the rocks,
Warm with an April sun,
And see the night creep down the fells,
And the stars climb one by one.

God bless,
Loveday
11th November 2020