

Remembrance Sunday, 8th November 2015. Canongate Kirk.

Hebrews 13:8

Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and for ever.

As well as a text this morning let me take as a title for this short reflection the motto of HMS Queen Elizabeth, *Semper Eadem*, ever the same. It's printed on the plaque beneath the Royal Navy Ensign which was recently presented to Canongate Kirk as a sign of our congregation's affiliation to the ship's company, and now hangs in our War Memorial Chapel. As well as the motto, the plaque refers to the battle honours won by the current ship's predecessor, the first HMS Queen Elizabeth, from both the First and Second World Wars beginning with Dardanelles in 1915, and continuing with Crete in 1941, Sabang in 1944, Burma 1944-45 and the East Indies 1945. And beneath them the ship's motto *Semper Eadem*, ever the same. Ever the same reminders of service and sacrifice, ever the same reasons to remember, from one ship to another, from one generation to the next. As these centenary years of the First World War unfold, the Royal Navy will be much involved in marking next year's centenary of the Battle of Jutland. But HMS Queen Elizabeth's battle honour for the Dardanelles in 1915 reminds us in this centenary year of the Royal Navy's earlier engagement off the coast of Turkey, in a battle that was to become something of a precursor to the Gallipoli Landings, already commemorated so poignantly in the springtime. More recently the national commemoration has been of the Battle of Loos and if ever there was an example of the sort of thing St Paul might have had in mind when he wrote to the Church in Rome, surely it's the Battle of Loos in which battalions from every Scottish regiment fought and suffered huge numbers of casualties. *For your sake we are being killed all day long; we are accounted as sheep to be slaughtered.* Of the 21,000 men killed in action, over 7,000 were Scottish soldiers. Almost every town and village in Scotland was affected by the slaughter at Loos in September 1915. *For your sake we are being killed all day long; we are accounted as sheep to be slaughtered.*

But our more cheerful text comes not from the Letter to the Romans but from the Letter to the Hebrews a little later in the New Testament, and is intended to echo the motto of HMS Queen Elizabeth, *Semper Eadem*, ever the same. *Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and for ever.*

Praise him for his grace and favour to our fathers in distress;

Praise him, still the same for ever, slow to chide and swift to bless.

The Jesus Christ of yesterday is the same as of yesteryear too, the very same Saviour to which the troops turned at Loos as they went over the top and out into No Man's Land; the very same Lord to whom the sailors onboard HMS Queen Elizabeth prayed as they prepared to engage with the enemy in the Dardanelles strait. *Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and for ever.* Amidst all the dangers and difficulties, all the watching and the waiting, all the risks and all the uncertainties this one truth stood reassuringly firm. *Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and for ever.* Over the years how many sailors and soldiers and airmen have whispered to themselves in the heat of battle *O thou who changest not, abide with me?* In his Letter to the Philippians, St Paul takes the thought one step further, *Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus.* Not only is he the same yesterday, today and for ever but we are to be the same as him, who being found in human form, humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death. Today we give thanks again for those who have done just that in the service of our country and in the cause of peace and freedom these last hundred years and more; for each successive generation that has stepped up to the mark and been obedient to the point of death at sea, on land and in the air; for the men and women of today's Armed Forces who are still ready to lay down their lives for their friends, from one generation to the next. For them and for us *Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and for ever.* *Semper eadem*, ever the same. Thanks be to God. Amen.