



Readings – poems and scripture

Wilfrid Owen -1914

War broke: and now the Winter of the world
With perishing great darkness closes in.
The foul tornado, centred at Berlin,
Is over all the width of Europe whirled,
Rending the sails of progress. Rent or furled
Are all Art's ensigns. Verse wails. Now begin
Famines of thought and feeling. Love's wine's thin.
The grain of human Autumn rots, down-hurled.

For after Spring had bloomed in early Greece,
And Summer blazed her glory out with Rome,
An Autumn softly fell, a harvest home,
A slow grand age, and rich with all increase.
But now, for us, wild Winter, and the need
Of sowings for new Spring, and blood for seed.

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Joel: 2: 1-3; 12-13

Blow the trumpet in Zion;
 sound the alarm on my holy mountain!
Let all the inhabitants of the land tremble,
 for the day of the Lord is coming, it is near—
a day of darkness and gloom,
 a day of clouds and thick darkness!
Like blackness spread upon the mountains
 a great and powerful army comes;
their like has never been from of old,
 nor will be again after them
 in ages to come.
Fire devours in front of them,
 and behind them a flame burns.
Before them the land is like the garden of Eden,
 but after them a desolate wilderness,
 and nothing escapes them.
Yet even now, says the Lord,
 return to me with all your heart,

with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning;
rend your hearts and not your clothing.
Return to the Lord, your God,
for he is gracious and merciful,
slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love,
and relents from punishing.

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Isaac Rosenberg – On receiving news of the war

Snow is a strange white word.
No ice or frost
Has asked of bud or bird
For Winter's cost.

Yet ice and frost and snow
From earth to sky
This Summer land doth know.
No man knows why.

In all men's hearts it is.
Some spirit old
Hath turned with malign kiss
Our lives to mould.

Red fangs have torn His face.
God's blood is shed.
He mourns from His lone place
His children dead.

O! ancient crimson curse!
Corrode, consume.
Give back this universe
Its pristine bloom.

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Isaiah 2: 2b-4

In days to come
the mountain of the Lord's house
shall be established as the highest of the mountains,
and shall be raised above the hills;
all the nations shall stream to it.
Many peoples shall come and say,
'Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord,
to the house of the God of Jacob;

that he may teach us his ways
and that we may walk in his paths.'
For out of Zion shall go forth instruction,
and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.
He shall judge between the nations,
and shall arbitrate for many peoples;
they shall beat their swords into ploughshares,
and their spears into pruning-hooks;
nation shall not lift up sword against nation,
neither shall they learn war any more.

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Rose Macaulay – Many Sisters to Many Brothers

When we fought campaigns (in the long Christmas rains)
With soldiers spread in troops on the floor,
I shot as straight as you, my losses were as few,
My victories as many, or more.
And when in naval battle, amid cannon's rattle,
Fleet met fleet in the bath,
My cruisers were as trim, my battleships as grim,
My submarines cut as swift a path.
Or, when it rained too long, and the strength of the strong
Surged up and broke a way with blows,
I was as fit and keen, my fists hit as clean,
Your black eye matched my bleeding nose.
Was there a scrap or ploy in which you, the boy,
Could better me? You could not climb higher,
Ride straighter, run as quick (and to smoke made you sick)
. . . But I sit here, and you're under fire.

Oh, it's you that have the luck, out there in blood and muck:
You were born beneath a kindly star;

All we dreamt, I and you, you can really go and do,
And I can't, the way things are.
In a trench you are sitting, while I am knitting
A hopeless sock that never gets done.
Well, here's luck, my dear;--and you've got it, no fear;
But for me . . . a war is poor fun.

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Lamentations 2: 1-3; 6-7

How lonely sits the city
that once was full of people!
How like a widow she has become,
she that was great among the nations!
She that was a princess among the provinces
has become a vassal.

She weeps bitterly in the night,
with tears on her cheeks;
among all her lovers
she has no one to comfort her;
all her friends have dealt treacherously with her,
they have become her enemies.

Judah has gone into exile with suffering
and hard servitude;
she lives now among the nations,
and finds no resting-place;
her pursuers have all overtaken her
in the midst of her distress.

From daughter Zion has departed
all her majesty.
Her princes have become like stags
that find no pasture;
they fled without strength
before the pursuer.

Jerusalem remembers,
in the days of her affliction and wandering,
all the precious things
that were hers in days of old.

When her people fell into the hand of the foe,
and there was no one to help her,
the foe looked on mocking
over her downfall.

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WW Gibson – The Messages

"I cannot quite remember.... There were five
Dropt dead beside me in the trench – and three
Whispered their dying messages to me...."

Back from the trenches, more dead than alive,
Stone-deaf and dazed, and with a broken knee,
He hobbled slowly, muttering vacantly:

"I cannot quite remember.... There were five
Dropt dead beside me in the trench – and three
Whispered their dying messages to me....

"Their friends are waiting, wondering how they thrive....
Waiting a word in silence patiently....
But what they said, or who their friends may be,

"I cannot quite remember.... There were five
Dropt dead beside me in the trench – and three
Whispered their dying messages to me...."

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2 Corinthians 4: 6-11

For it is the God who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness', who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. But we have this treasure in clay jars, so that it may be made clear that this extraordinary power belongs to God and does not come from us. We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be made visible in our bodies. For while we live, we are always being given up to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus may be made visible in our mortal flesh.

John 12: 27-35a

Jesus said 'Now my soul is troubled. And what should I say—"Father, save me from this hour"? No, it is for this reason that I have come to this hour. Father, glorify your name.' Then a voice came from heaven, 'I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again.' The crowd standing there heard it and said that it was thunder. Others said, 'An angel has spoken to him.' Jesus answered, 'This voice has come for your sake, not for mine. Now is the judgement of this world; now the ruler of this world will be driven out. And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people^{*} to myself.' He said this to indicate the kind of death he was to die. The crowd answered him, 'We have heard from the law that the Messiah remains for ever. How can you say that the Son of Man must be lifted up? Who is this Son of Man?' Jesus said to them, 'The light is with you for a little longer. Walk while you have the light, so that the darkness may not overtake you.'

John 15: 9-10; 12-13

As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love. This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends.

Other Resources:

Possible Hymns:	Abide with me
	All my hope on God is founded
	Jesu, lover of my soul
	O God of earth and altar
Potential Music:	A setting of the <i>Kyrie Eleison</i>
	Brahms <i>Wie lieblich</i>
	Farrant <i>Lord for thy tender mercy's sake</i>
	Gibbons <i>Drop, drop slow tears</i>
	Harris <i>Faire is the Heaven</i>
	Purcell <i>Hear my prayer</i>
	Purcell <i>Remember not, Lord</i>
	Tallis <i>If ye love me</i>
	Tallis <i>Salvator Mundi</i>

Max Arthur's *Forgotten Voices of the Great War*, Ebury Press, 2002, may be helpful in selecting appropriate readings from contemporary reflections.

Sir Hew Strachan's *The First World War: A New History*, Simon and Schuster, 2003, Margaret MacMillan's *The War that ended peace*, Profile Books, 2013 or Christopher Clark's *The Sleepwalkers: How Europe went to War in 1914*, Penguin, 2012, and many other recent works about the Great War all contain material which could be used to contextualise the Vigil. Otherwise, local libraries and archives may be willing to assist in researching more focussed local material.