

Friends

I came across the story of a young family back in the nineteen-thirties. A father, mother and three-year-old son were at the service at their war memorial. The father said to the boy, "Look, all these names are of the men who didn't come back from the war." Then the child said, "Daddy, when do all these soldiers come back out of the monument?" The story was told by an un-named Methodist minister, who went on to say, "I work for that idea. To make the world these men would desire if they did come back out of the monument."

The world has changed so much, that it would rather bewilder anyone who died in the 1900's I imagine, but this idea of working towards a world that those who have died would be proud of, would desire, were they to return is simply one way of looking at working towards Kingdom values. References in the Bible to the return of Christ call us to work towards a world that he would approve of, love and enjoy.

One of the jewels in the crown of the Thames Valley Circuit is the Stanley Spencer Gallery in the old Methodist Chapel at the bottom of Cookham High Street. Stanley Spencer lived most of his life in Cookham and re-interpreted many Biblical stories using the people of the town. His painting "Resurrection of the Soldiers" centres on an unconventional, personal vision of Christian hope, the sacredness of everyday life, and a universal love that triumphs over the horrors of war.

The central theme is the broader resurrection, and Spencer interprets it as a joyful reawakening and reunion, rather than a day of judgement. Soldiers and mules emerge from their graves restored and peaceful to be reunited with their friends in an earthly paradise, which for Spencer was Cookham.

The painting is a personal memorial to his fallen brother Sydney and other comrades who died in the First World War, but rather than focusing on violence or an empty tomb, this painting focuses on a celebration of life, showing the dead reawakening to peace. It is a reminder both of our hope for those who have died and the importance of working towards peace.

God bless, Vicci