

17. Beauty

This time last year, in sharp contrast to what was going on in our hospitals and care homes, we were just entering the loveliest spring many of us could remember. It brought something holy and sustaining into our strange new world and into our deep concern for those on the frontline.

Geoffrey Studdert Kennedy, who died on this day in 1929, linked beauty with a frontline of another sort. He was an army chaplain during World War I, renowned for his bravery and much loved by his soldiers, his generous sharing of cigarettes earning him the nickname 'Woodbine Willie'.

He was also a prolific poet, writing for his men and drawing on his time in the trenches. So the title of his most popular collection, *The Unutterable Beauty*, was surprising at first sight. In the title poem, he writes movingly of God's beauty evident in the natural world and how he longs to share it, thereby bringing "new light into the darkness of sad eyes." The Norfolk poppies above are a reminder of the little pockets of red beauty which he would have seen "in Flanders Fields".

But Woodbine Willie found beauty in other places too – in the unspoken bravery of soldiers in hellish conditions and in the comradely love they had for one another. In light of both these things, he found the ragged uniforms of the soldiers "more beautiful than Solomon's garments".



Today...

... may all who face trauma and suffering,
find your beauty, O God, in surprising places.

Amen