

Sermon preached by the Rev'd Cynthia Jackson, Remembrance Sunday, 2nd Sunday before Advent, 13th December, St. Mary's Wimbledon.

"The peace of God which passes all human understanding keep your hearts and minds in the knowledge and love of God and of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord..." is the inscription on the communion rail kneeler in the Warrior Chapel. These well-known words are from introduction to the Blessing in the Book of Common Prayer. That is the peace that we all long for in our lives.

Today Remembrance Sunday we remember and give thanks for all those men and women who have sacrificed their lives in the service of their country. Not only in the two Great wars of the last century, but in all subsequent and current conflicts around the world. It is important too for us to remember all men, women and children whose lives have been devastated by war or the aftermath of war.

My father was in the army in the Second World War and was involved in the bombing of the monastery of Monte Casino and saw starving children in Italy. My mother said that my father was a changed man when he came home. My sister and I a few years ago visited the war grave cemetery at Monte Casino and the rebuilt Monastery – it was a moving experience. My uncle as a young man of 18 was in the Chindits in Burma, was fortunate to survive, but suffered ill health all his life and did not talk about the war years. Yes War changes people's lives.

It was hoped that the 1st World War was a war to end all wars, but we can see over the last 100 years that this is sadly not the case. As we read the plaques in the Warrior Chapel the cost of war to individual families is brought home to us. Today present day 'theatres' of War produce devastation on a previously unknown scale. Horrific injuries are the result, but, we saw how brave injured servicemen were as they overcome their disabilities to take part in the para-Olympics. But we also know that wars can generate and perpetuate hatred between people of different countries, nationalities or religious affiliations, making peaceful coexistence far more difficult.

We often hear the question asked *'What would Jesus do in this situation?'* We can ask that question in relation to our world today. In his day Jesus wept over the state of Jerusalem ruled by the Romans, an occupying power. I am sure too Jesus would weep today over the situation in many parts of the world where each day men, women and children live in fear, fear of unjust regimes and terrorist organisations such as Isis or Boko Haram. On our television screens we see images of families fleeing for their lives across the Mediterranean in unseaworthy boats. Many of these families have had to flee from their homes due to bombing or devastation in their own countries.

How easy it is to blame other people, other countries, for the wrongs of the world. Jesus called people to repentance and calls us to repentance today. He calls us to see the faults in our own lives before criticising other people. In Luke 6:41, we read:

... 'Why do you see the spec in your neighbours eye, but do not notice the log in your own eye?...' (The authorised version refers to a mote and beam.)

However our standard of behaviour has to be much higher than that. In Matthew 5:39, Jesus tells his hearers:

... " You have heard that it was said an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth." But I say to you do not resist an evil doer. If anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn the other also... If anyone forces you to go one mile, go also the second..."

Roman soldiers had the right to force a local person to carry their equipment up to a mile but Jesus is telling them to be willing to go for a second mile.

Jesus is turning the world's values upside down.

Our natural reaction when we are attacked by someone is to retaliate but Jesus is giving us a new standard of behaviour.

As we look at the world today we may think that Jesus' standard of behaviour is impossible. However when we look back over some of the desperate situations in the world in past years and see how transformation can take place we can be full of hope.

Archbishop Desmond Tutu in his book *"God has a Dream"* writes "... *There is no such thing as a totally hopeless case....*" Echoing the words of Martin Luther King, Tutu writes:

"...God says to you, I have a dream. Please help me to realise it. It is a dream of a world whose ugliness and squalor and poverty, whose war and hostility, greed and harsh competitiveness, alienation and disharmony are changed into their glorious counterparts..."

Following the abolition of apartheid in South Africa in 1994, The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) was established in 1996. This was a court of restorative justice and Desmond Tutu was a member. Both victims of violence and perpetrators of violence were invited to give statements. Perpetrators could request amnesty from both civil and criminal prosecution. This was seen by many as a crucial component of the transition to full and free democracy in South Africa. This was indeed a different way of settling gross injustices without resorting to further violence and is certainly needed in today's world.

We may ask on this Remembrance Sunday what can we as individuals or as members of the Christian church do? We can feel helpless and overwhelmed by the sheer magnitude of the problem of countries waging war. We can be fearful at the thought of Donald Trump being President of the United States with his violent rhetoric of the presidential campaign .

Christianity is a religion of hope. We have to start where we are, and with ourselves and our relationship with our own families and neighbourhoods. As we receive the love of God in our lives so we can show that love in our relationships with our families, our neighbours, our fellow church members. Then we can move out to the wider world to work for peace. We get that strength from being united with Jesus in

this Holy Communion service as we obey Jesus' command to do this in remembrance of me.

God does not ask us to like everybody we meet but to love him or her as he loves us. God loved us so much that he allowed his son Jesus Christ to be sacrificed for us.

On this Remembrance Sunday I would like to let Desmond Tutu have the last word.

“Good is stronger than evil;

love is stronger than hate;

light is stronger than darkness;

life is stronger than death.

Victory is ours, through him who loves us.”

Amen.

“God has a dream –A Vision of Hope for Our Time” – Desmond Tutu publ.Doubleday
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