

Prepare for Peace

This week we remember those from our families, our church, and communities who served this country during times of conflict and war. We acknowledge their suffering, and their sacrifice for us... laying their lives on the line for the sake of future generations they would never know.

We do not honour or glorify war itself. War is (for lack of a better word) hell, breaking loose on earth. We honour those who have endured that hell on earth so that others might be spared. We honour and give thanks for their courage, for their commitment, and we pray not to forget or take for granted the high-cost others have paid for our lives. We remember them, in the hopes that one day all wars will be no more. Tragically, it's all too clear that that day has not yet come.

Not only are there many places in our world today where brutal warfare continues, putting both military and civilian lives in serious threat, but there are other, less obvious but still destructive conflicts brewing all around us... tearing apart our families, communities, and countries.

Over these past few years, especially since the pandemic hit the world, it seems like the pressures to pick sides and turn on each other have only gotten worse. Suspicion, fear, and outright hatred seem to have firmly taken hold in our divided culture. In many ways, we seem to be at war with ourselves.

Of course, Mark 3:24 says, "If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand". But that hasn't seemed to slow the spread of this spirit of conflict at work these days. And even worse, some claiming the name of Jesus Christ our Lord are among the most vicious voices, causing all kinds of discord both inside and outside our Church communities.

I am not saying there's no room for tensions, or debates, or even arguments in the Church... but it matters a great deal what kind of spirit is at work in us when they happen. We can be right about the details, and

dead wrong about the ways we share them. Especially when we forget the ways of the Living God.

Our first reading today from the prophet Micah helps us to *remember* that the Christian hope is not about “us vs. them”, but rather “God for us all”.

Micah’s days were no less filled with conflict and bloodshed than our own, and Israel’s powerful enemies were always on the horizon. And yet, like many other faithful prophets, Micah was given a message that spoke of God’s future as one of peace, justice, reconciliation... of warring nations being brought together by the rule of the Living God.

Micah 4:3-4 says “He will judge between many peoples and will settle disputes for strong nations far and wide. They will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks.

Nation will not take up sword against nation, nor will they train for war anymore. Everyone will sit under their own vine and under their own fig tree, and no one will make them afraid, for the Lord Almighty has spoken.

Despite the divisions and conflicts marring God’s good world, the LORD has promised to bring His *peace*... to make “war to cease in all the world”. If this is the heart of God for his world, if this is the goal he longs to bring about, that gives us some indication of what he wants from his people today. But even more clearly, in Jesus Christ his Son, God reveals his heart and ways to us, calling us to trust and follow him in his way as well.

All throughout his ministry, our Lord laid his life on the line to bring us God’s peace: bringing freedom, healing, and release to those who were held in bondage. Confronting corruption and hypocrisy, in friends and foes alike. Offering God’s forgiveness to broken-hearted sinners. In countless ways Christ worked to end all that divides us from God and each other.

But nothing compares to his taking up the cross on our behalf, accepting

our sentence of death himself, all to secure our pardon. He did not shy away from enduring mockery and shame. He did not fight back or flee when they whipped and tortured him. At the cross our Lord faced hell on earth, to bring an end to its reign.

To make peace, not only for his friends, but for his enemies. To reconcile this warring world to God, and win it's forgiveness by his own blood poured out, and his own body broken. At the cross, Christ reveals God's self-sacrifice for the sake of us all. And in his death and resurrection, God's Spirit of peace begins to break loose.

We know that on that first Easter Day the Risen Christ greets his frightened disciples by offering them peace and sending them into the world to share it.

The Church throughout the ages has received the peace of Christ as well. But to do so, we can't just talk about it. We have to live it. We are called to actively follow the way of Jesus every day, empowered by the Holy Spirit to resist the spirits of this age: fear, division, hatred, coercion and instead to be led by his peace, generosity, love, self-control, kindness, gentleness faithfulness, patience, and joy.

This itself is a serious battle! To truly practice patience when everything seems urgent. To embody gentleness instead of lashing out when we are hurt. To choose self-control and faithfulness when all that is in us wants to run the other way. To walk in love when everyone around us wants us to hate.

Ephesians 6:10-17, Paul spoke of this ongoing spiritual battle, and how to prepare for it: He said:

“Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his power. Put on the whole armor of God, so that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For our struggle is not against enemies of blood and flesh, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this

present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. Therefore, take up the whole armor of God, so that you may be able to withstand on that evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm. Stand therefore, and fasten the belt of truth around your waist, and put on the breastplate of righteousness. As shoes for your feet put on whatever will make you ready to proclaim the gospel of peace. With all of these, take the shield of faith, with which you will be able to quench all the flaming arrows of the evil one. Take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.”

Truth, righteousness, faith, salvation, the word of God, and the Gospel of peace... this is our Lord's way, this is our way too.

This is the battle Christ calls us to fight, the battle of faithfulness to God's Kingdom of peace, truth, and love, looking forward to the day the risen Lord Jesus causes us all to beat our swords into plowshares, and turn *our* spears into pruning hooks; when our nations shall not lift up swords against nation, and *we* shall not learn war anymore. We are called to prepare ourselves even now for that coming day when the peaceable reign of the Living God will be completed at last.

This week we rightly remember the sacrifice of our veterans, and we have much to be inspired by their courageous examples, especially in their willingness to suffer for the sake of others.

But we must also remember our ultimate battle is not against fellow people, it is the battle against the spirit of darkness that's already been won by Jesus Christ at the cross...

His victory, which we are called to share in by the way we live each day. Not taking his sacrifice for granted, but through the Holy Spirit's power living in the light of God's peace and holy love.

I'll close now with these beautiful words from our New Testament reading this morning, reminding us that whatever troubles we face, no matter how

hard the fight may seem, our Saviour is with us, and will be forever.

“No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.” Amen