

Sermon: A day of Remembrance

Today is Remembrance Sunday. It is the Sunday we take the time to commemorate Remembrance Day, which is set aside to remember and honour those who made a sacrifice for our country in armed conflict. I don't believe that we shouldn't be 'remembering these fallen soldiers' every day of the year, but we will respect their remembrance today.

Now, on a personal note, I have no memory of most of the wars Canada has participated in. Years and generations of family separate me from wars. My experience, or lack thereof with war, is the same as a great many Canadians of my generation and younger.

Unfortunately the struggles and tragedy of war seem to line the news waves these days.

But today, this is about ensuring that we as a society do not forget what has happened in the past. We as a country decided it was crucial to go to war on different occasions.

We as a country decided we must send men and women into armed conflict in South Africa in 1900, in World War 1, World War 2 and Korea. We chose to send soldiers to Afghanistan and to countless Peace Keeping operations over the decades.

These are decisions that cost people their lives. They resulted in injury and wounds; physical, mental and emotional. Those decisions, no matter what the merits, resulted in heartache and heartbreak for loved ones who remained at home. They resulted in incalculable loss for communities across our country.

In our reading today, we learn that Micah knew all about war. He was a prophet around 860 – 750 BC in the Southern Kingdom of Judah. He was contemporary with Amos and Hosea in the Northern Kingdom of Israel, and with Isaiah in Jerusalem in the Southern Kingdom.

His message and vision is for the two capital cities of these Kingdoms, Samaria and Jerusalem, warning them about the threat from the Assyrians, to both the Northern Kingdom of Israel and the Southern Kingdom of Judah.

He was probably describing events from first-hand experience. In 722 BC the Assyrians destroyed Samaria (in the North) and 20 years later attacked Jerusalem, only for the city to escape by a miracle. Micah almost certainly lived through both of these events and was deeply affected by them.

Not only did this involve heavy fighting but also a 3 year siege of Samaria. And for Micah, not only was there the horror of living through war, he also experienced a lost generation, in his case the 10 lost tribes of Israel because after the fall of Israel, the 10 tribes of the Northern Kingdom effectively disappeared.

We should never forget our lost generations, that is all those who lose their lives in battle fighting for freedom and liberty. We should never trivialise the fact that they gave everything in the cause for peace and freedom, and the incredible loss they and their families suffered, and, in some cases, are still suffering.

Micah spoke about the judgement and salvation of the Kingdom of God. But he was also able to look past the carnage of war and see the ultimate and peace that we have in God. He had a vision of a better world.

There may have been wars and carnage in the future that Micah saw but ultimately nations truly would turn their swords into ploughshares, their spears into pruning hooks and train for war no longer.

They would sit under their own vines and fig trees, as not only was the land peaceful, there would be a fair and equitable distribution of wealth. Despite the desperate situation, Micah showed that in God there was hope.

It is that hope which we as Christians hold out for our society, including the generations in our culture that are seemingly lost, lost not perhaps in the geographic sense, but in the sense of the Jews of Israel and Judah, lost spiritually and therefore wandering aimlessly and potentially lost eternally.

As Christians we are all part of that tapestry and we can choose to hold up our piece of the picture, our identity and responsibility, or not. As Christians we are called to hold up the flag of hope in our own country.

Today reminds us that without the sacrifice of others we would not have the nation we have today. We should not trivialise their sacrifice, nor mix metaphors or images and our calling is of a completely different nature to theirs, but it is a calling nonetheless. Who are those who we should be engaging with and the causes we should be standing up for?

Like Micah, we should speak out to our leaders about the hope we have in Christ, the real peace that he brings, the Godly economics that drives fair distribution of the world's resources. Like Micah too we need to speak out to individuals so that their lives can be changed and transformed by the hope that we all have in Christ.

Today we remember all those who lost their lives in the service of their country. As they responded to their call, will we respond to ours to bring about peace, justice and freedom? A call that is very different in its nature to theirs, but in our current times, no less urgent.

Those we remember today were laying down their lives for the cause of peace, justice and freedom, often through the call of duty to a country or nation. They gave up their freedom so that others could have theirs.

They fought injustice so that justice could ultimately triumph. We remember their sacrifice from the freedom that their efforts and commitment bought. They gave up their lives so that others could live in the freedom for which they fought.

We remember them with gratitude for what they achieved and what their sacrifice enabled. As we know all too well in our current turbulent times there is a heavy toll of human life in war. Many more are injured and impacted by the physical and mental damage and suffering war brings.

Modern warfare is at the same time increasingly technological and increasingly fragmented, increasingly complex and increasingly diffuse in its aims and outcomes, increasingly widespread yet increasingly local. It must seem too many, as it seemed to Micah, that there is an army approaching and peril and desperation at their gates.

We give thanks today for those who sacrificed so much, and for those who continue to do so day in and day out, in the cause of peace and freedom. We remember too that we will only turn our weapons of war into tools for peace when God is at the very centre of our lives and society, and we are content to walk humbly with our God in obedience to him.

On Remembrance Sunday we look back. Look back to the wars and conflicts that have troubled our world and remember with gratitude not only those who gave their lives, but those who came back maimed and injured, many of them scarred for life. They served so that the world could be a better place and that those that followed would have a more peaceful future.

If our gratitude to them is only partial, our hope for that new future they dreamed of can never be full. That is why it is important to remember them with gratefulness and respect today. Their suffering, hardship and sacrifice is also a salutary reminder that the world's hope cannot be based on human efforts but ultimately in God alone.

Micah speaks of hope in a seemingly hopeless situation. Hope that, despite the invasion of Assyria and the exile in Babylon, and all that will happen to the Jews in the coming years, (some of which could never have been imagined as we reflect on more modern times) there will be a New Jerusalem where there will be peace, the resources of the world shall be shared, and God will reign supreme.

For Christians this hope is made real through the sacrifice of Christ. It is through his suffering, death and resurrection that we have a real and certain hope in the eternal future.

As Paul says in Romans, if God is for us, who can be against us? That is the hope in which we share. A heavenly hope which is not based on human decisions and interventions, or on governments and organizations, but on God through His Son Jesus Christ. Amen