

REMEMBRANCE SUNDAY – 8th November 2020

Peace can be an elusive experience. 2020 has seen us marking the 75th anniversary of VE and VJ days. If only those days back in 1945 had brought a world-wide consensus to abandon all forms of warfare.

Both from the world wars of the 20th century and many conflicts right up to the present time, we remember today huge numbers

- who died
- service personnel maimed horribly in conflict
- many struggling with post-traumatic stress, and
- homes racked with ongoing grief ...

Despite the sacrifices, the establishment of peace is desperately needed still, in a number of war zones around the world right now.

Dame Vera Lynn died earlier this year, but her songs remain as poignant as ever.

It doesn't end there. The absence of and yearning for peace is a global issue for the 21st century.

Peace and the sense of well-being is needed urgently in the USA today as the very fractious election draws to a close.

Peace is not guaranteed in the ebb and flow of local church life or seemingly nice communities. Issues and proposals we may be asked to discuss in the next year are already straining bonds of trust and fellowship in some parts of the national church as we know it.

The absence of peace in some homes, families we know and between loved ones we care deeply for is a desperately painful situation to be caught up in or watch at arms-length.

There is good news!

Israel's prophet Isaiah foresaw the day when the human cry and need for true peace will have come.

As the prince of peace whose rule is ever on the increase, Jesus of Nazareth, as Messiah and Lord WILL restore harmony to all creation and provide security to the most vulnerable ... the day is coming when the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the Lord.

We are now more than 2500 years nearer that time than when Isaiah uttered this particular prophecy.

We should be getting excited!

As teacher, Jesus made it very clear to his disciples - in this time of waiting for God's rule to be fully unveiled and thereafter uncontested - choices we make now have a deep impact on whether we experience God's love and draw strength from it. We can remain in God's love, whereby keeping his commands are our delight and divine joy fuels our daily life.

I want to remind you today of Matthew 5v9. Jesus said:

'Blessed are the peacemakers for they shall be called the children of God.'

It is one of the beatitudes Jesus used to lay a foundation for the rest of what we call his Sermon on the Mount. It should inspire us again on this Remembrance Sunday. It is a beatitude reminding us we can both experience God's rule in the world now and expect more to come.

When Jesus said '*... peacemakers ... shall be called the daughters and sons of God*', the underlying sense is peacemakers will see the day when, as God's daughters and sons through faith in Jesus as Saviour and Lord, we are summoned in, given full access to the family of God in heaven.

This vision of unrestricted family connectedness centred on Father Son and Holy Spirit touches a raw nerve at this time renewed lockdown when the government of the day feels the need to keep us away from the places we gather in for worship. Be that as it is, Jesus' vision reminds us we were designed to be together, in family, with God dropping in among us in the cool of the day, where no tears need fall because mourning, weeping and pain are expunged.

Meantime this same vision can become a clarion call to make again the best choices to be all God has designed us to be and do whilst this world remains our home.

What does this mean?

A) Peacemakers are quite different than peacekeepers.

Peacekeepers largely work to keep warring parties apart; standing in gaps often full of tension and uncertainty.

Peacemakers are focussed on:

- bringing all factions to lay down their weapons,
- dialling down harsh rhetoric that splinters and reinforces enmity,
- enabling once sworn foes to respect one another, seeing the good in the other's perspective and virtues ... so that together they can build a better family, better community and better nation.

B) Jesus is the supreme peacemaker.

In Colossians 1v20 Paul speaks of Jesus – because of his life as a human being – able to:
'reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.'

The very same word used by Jesus talking in Matthew 5 about peacemakers is used by Paul to encapsulate what Jesus achieved.

He did this because he was the Word made flesh familiar with any and all temptations known to us without falling into sin himself, who in Gethsemane chose to say ‘... *not my will, but yours, be done*’.

The peace-making effected by Jesus was the ultimate sacrifice a perfect human being made ... to resolve the otherwise unpardonable condition of our human mess. Jesus’ ministry was to change the trajectory of human history, to bring back divine order to all that had been marred by sin’s deadly infection.

Let’s sign on again as peacemakers today. We should not be daunted by the acknowledgement we have not been without sin or fault. As a friend of mine once said, in a prayer spoken publicly, “Even I, Lord, have sinned!”

When Jesus said ‘Come follow me ...’ it was about ordinary people making an about turn, embracing the rule and culture of heaven in our lives, being caught up as partners in his divine mission in the world today.

Jesus’s vision and expectation is as stark as it is empowering:

- as he was, we will be also ...
- us making like choices to his as human beings,
- people ready to pay a similar price ...
- loving one another,
- laying down our lives for our friends,
- turning the other cheek when required
- instinctively showing the fruit of God’s impact on us ...
- not for our short-term comfort but for the sake of rescuing, reconciling and reconnecting ...
- buoyed by the joy of being known here and now as God’s friends ...
- getting ever-nearer the day when we shall see him without lockdown, no longer governed by tiers or levels of restriction, forever with Him as He is, in all His splendour, glory and sheer beauty.

*Man of sorrows! What a name
for the Son of God who came
ruined sinners to reclaim!
Alleluia! What a Saviour!*

*Bearing shame and scoffing rude,
in my place condemned he stood;
sealed my pardon with his blood;
Alleluia! What a Saviour!*

*When he comes, our glorious King,
all his ransomed home to bring,
then anew this song we'll sing:
Alleluia! What a Saviour!*

Nigel di Castiglione