

Squamish United Church  
Rev. Karen Millard  
Remembrance Day

November 9, 2014

Scripture Readings:

Micah 4:1-5

John 15:9-17

### **Peaceful Longings**

Let us begin with a familiar poem by a grade 7 student.

“I don’t remember”

I don’t remember the sound of guns ringing in my ears.  
I don’t remember soldiers, buried in the mud.  
I don’t remember the tears, running down so many sorrowful faces.  
I don’t remember how it feels to be attacked by thousands of soldiers,

Or not knowing if my husband or children are gone forever.  
I don’t know how it feels to kill someone with a bullet that I shot.  
I don’t know how it feels to have lost a limb or a friend.  
I don’t remember a time without freedom, peace, or loved ones near by.

I remember peace and freedom.  
I remember the joyful chirping of little birds, flying in the breeze.  
I remember the warm feeling of having friends and family greet me, when I come home from a hard day.  
I remember the joyful laughter of friends and family.  
I remember the feeling of knowing the next day I will wake up to another cheerful morning.  
I remember peace, freedom, and love.

As long as I live, I will never forget the people who gave me this freedom,  
Brave young soldiers giving all they’ve got to fight for their country, until the last drop of blood has fallen from their brave hearts of gold.  
They were all soldiers to the end, and I am thankful for all they gave so that I could lead a happy carefree life of peace and freedom.  
To all that helped me get this freedom and peace, whether they lay in the fields of poppies, or they live today, thank you.  
Thank you for the love, peace, and freedom that you risked life and limb to give me.<sup>1</sup>

I can’t pretend to have a personal deep impacting story of war because I do not. I have had the privilege of growing up in a time and country without having to see war face-to-face. And yet in

---

<sup>1</sup> Written by a grad 7 student, source unknown

my brief lifetime I have heard stories from family, mentors and friends that have impacted in a way that I dare not forget. Because I believe God weeps as we in our humanity war with one another often in the name of God himself.

And so when I think of this day what I do remember is stories and moments that others have shared. It is these images that flash before me when I think of war

- I remember my mother telling me stories of being hid under the dining room table when the sirens went off
- I think of my friend Ika who used to try to hide the fact that she was German because of the shame that carried for her.
- I think of my Jewish Hebrew instructor who shared stories of hiding under floor boards while people searched above.
- I think of one of my hero's Harold who shares a story of rescuing fighter pilots from the trenches after they had crashed – in one case he being the only one to make it out alive.
- I remember seeing my strong mentor and friend Robin white-faced and shaking the day the planes hit the world trade centre and then I remember him beginning to share stories of what it was like to have to be at war because his country demanded it of him. I remember the fear in his eyes as he admitted he had brought his family to this country to escape the violence.
- I will never forget a few Septembers past standing in the Jordan River on the Gaza strip – Listening to the construction sounds of a military base being built on the other side of the river bank while soldiers with machine guns looked on while we prayed for and baptized our friends. But more than that I remember looking up and seeing a tear running down the cheek of a young soldier who stood over us. And I wonder where that soldier is today and I dare not imagine the atrocity he has lived and seen.
- On that same trip I remember looking straight into the eyes of a young man no more than 16 who stood at a check-point just outside of Jerusalem dressed as a man of war, gun in hand, command on his face, and deep, deep fear in his eyes.
- Since that time I have experienced sitting with more than one friend who has a son on the front lines...words cannot express those moments.
- And most closely related I am sure I will never forget sitting and watching a movie with Macky not long after we started dating. And In a brief moment he tensed up and tears came to his eyes “I’ve been there he said... on the front lines... and I watched my three friends die.” And shortly thereafter five more men from his regiment were killed

and in the last year even more. And yet still he believes they are fighting for justice, that the goal is peace for his people and so somehow their deaths are honourable.

- I also know that to this day he wakes up from nightmares of those experiences

– I remember sharing with Macky one day that I had been asked if I would be willing to go to Afghanistan as a military chaplain - I think that would be an honour I said in my innocence. But I was quickly reminded of how little I know when he who loves me and had lived through war started to cry just because I would even consider it.

I have not lived in the midst of war but I have glimpsed the impact it has had on the lives of many I have encountered on this journey of life. I admit that in this last year as I watch the conflicts of the world go by I have come to realize that there is a possibility of world war in my life time. I know that in our own country in the last weeks the reality of attack has come closer than many of us would have ever dreamed. And yet I have also been forced to see once again the need for healthcare systems and government to become proactive and preventative in their approach to mental health, depression and wellness.

Some of you have shared with me your stories or experiences of war, peace, injustice and truth and I know there are many more I do not know. For some of you it is those very experiences that draw you here. And so I recognize that most of us come to this place to seek a different way of being. To be people of a different way. To be people of justice, freedom, peace and truth. To be the kind of people walking along side Jesus with the heart of God. Most of us long to be Transformed to people of love and peace who give of what we have.

That is the story told in “the Observer” this month in ‘Conversations with Edith’ told by Angela Bailey. She begins “My late mother’s one surviving friend, Edith, lives in a nursing home in the UK not far from the town to which she immigrated in 1946 from Berlin.” Edith had moved to a small town in England when she married a British church organist. She wanted to live in London but it was not really all that close. She was however happy to leave her parents because they were supporters of Hitler. Edith shares “When my granddaughter was born, I called my father. He asked me her name. I told him, Sarah. He was furious - how dare you call a great-grandchild of mine by a Jewish name?”

Bailey asks Edith *What was it like to be a teenager in Berlin during wartime?* Terrible things were happening. One day, I ran to my church and asked my priest, “Wasn’t Jesus a Jew?” “of course,” he said, “Then why are our Jewish neighbours disappearing and others taking their homes? Why are they attacked and no one helps them?” He put his finger to his lips and hushed me. “My child,” he said, “we live in difficult times; we mustn’t ask questions.”

*What was it like for you here in the UK after the war?* Sometimes hard, especially to begin with, I joined a wonderful choir in the town. Two women said they would not sing with a German. I told the director I understood. It was too soon for me to join. I would withdraw and come back in

a few years. He said, “No If you leave, I will leave. Music is a great healer. We all work together.” So I stayed and no one left.”

*“You never sang in our church choir on Remembrance Day” ...I stayed away so that people could grieve and not feel embarrassed by my presence.*

*“Edith, do you think it’s time to let go of Remembrance Day? Some feel it glorifies war. They say we should focus on peace.”* Of course we should focus on peace, yes, but first we have to understand why it is so important. Remembrance Day is about remembering how easy it is for any nation to follow the wrong leadership and fall over the precipice into chaos. We remember the horror, the devastation, the depravity and the colossal losses and waste of human life. But most important is to remember what human nature is capable of when we lose our way. We all have much to seek forgiveness for.”<sup>2</sup>

And so today as we remember we have an opportunity to ask ourselves how do we live? Do we live just lives? Do we abide in God’s love. As people who ‘remember’ the way of Jesus we are called to look at each person as a creation of the most holy God. Regardless of status, wealth, nationality, sexual orientation, or religious traditions we are all creations of God. All should experience just living.

That’s the commandment that we say we follow to “love one another as I have loved you.” God has chosen us for love. Not of a select few but of all. When Jesus asks us to remember at the table - to be nourished by his body and blood. We are called to remember his way of life. The justice way. We are called to remember a Jesus who lived peace and reform - who did not conquer Rome but lived love for the outcasts in the midst of the empire.

Instead Jesus challenged the injustice of the time refusing to treat the outcast as unworthy. Jesus lived grace, love, justice and equality for all. On this day of remembrance perhaps we are called not only to look back but also to be attentive to the needs of our world today. To ask who are the people of our world who are not considered worthy of love? Who do we fail to offer equal opportunity and to?

The conversation with Edith ends this way, Bailey says *“You wand my mother both suffered in wartime yet despite your differences you were friends.”* Edith responds. We, too, were victims, living on different sides of the conflict. She knew all about suffering and grief. It made her compassionate. When I came to your home, your mother and I did not speak about the war. She made me tea (Edith tears up) And? She brought out her best china for me.”<sup>3</sup>

Most often war is about a failure to understand one another or a belief that we have the right understanding of the way God sees things. And unfortunately it seems there are times when we have to fight against another to demand peace and justice for all.

---

<sup>2</sup> Conversations with Edith “The Observer” November 2014 pg. 50

<sup>3</sup> IBID

But war wasn't or isn't about winning, or at least it shouldn't be.

Today is about peace and justice. It's about living into that which God has created us to be as people of peace and love. Today we are called to remember all those who fought when we had to face injustice in the world. Today we give thanks for those who gave their all for peace. Today we ask what are the things in our world that are still unjust that we need to keep fighting for not with weapons and killing but as advocates of 'the way' of truth and love.

Today we ask what injustice is happening in our world that we turn a blind eye to. Who is being treated as less than that we don't speak truth for? If not us who will shine the light in the darkness?

Who will offer a new way of life and hope?

If not us who will remember to heal this bruised and broken world?

Today we Remember that God weeps for all who suffer and for all who live without hope. And God waits and longs for justice to flow down like a mighty river in this world. Amen.