

Lest We Forget

Readings: Micah 4:1-5; Revelation 21:1-6

The ceremonies and rituals of Anzac Day all have the same theme "Lest we forget". There will be news stories, articles in the paper, even a new movie about the war in mining tunnels in WWI, which will help us remember.

As we remember, firstly we are putting a human face on these events which can simply be historic events, "1066 and all that" can so easily become "1914 and all that" as the generations pass. This Cathedral as with so many throughout Australia has a war memorial with names, and we need to remember that each of those names has a story. In particular we have a memorial to Eric Campbell, the last ANZAC, who enlisted at the age of 16, there are memorial windows in the Nixon chapel, there is the flag which was carried by troops before departing from Hobart, as well as the honour board at the Murray St. entrance.

We can also talk to veterans and listen to their story. In my own family, military service meant different things. My grandfather was in the Royal Reserve when the Great War started, was immediately mobilised and after 6 weeks basic training was sent off to France. Unfortunately the train driver of the troop carrier was a German sympathiser and took the train straight across the front line and the entire train was captured. My grandfather then spent the rest of the war in a prisoner of war camp, an experience of which he never spoke, only speaking of being billeted in Holland in 1917 in a sort of prisoner of war exchange.

My father lived through the Blitz as a boy in London, and speaks of cycling to school whilst watching bombs drop. His national service as a medical orderly in the Air Force after the war was less exciting as he only had two patients: someone who managed to get his finger stuck in the trigger of a gun and helping the base cat have kittens (although this did lead to a life in obstetrics and gynaecology).

It has been my great privilege however, to speak with veterans of the Battle of Britain, Kokoda, Burma, Korea and Vietnam, as well as reading biographies of people such as Weary Dunlop, and the war memoirs of Spike Milligan for a bit of light relief.

All of these things help us to remember the real people behind commemorations of this week. They and their sacrifice should not be forgotten.

But there is more to "Lest we forget" than this. Remembering such human cost and carnage is not simply about recalling the past, it is about how we live now. Not forgetting will mean seeking to build a community which was worth the effort and the sacrifice of so many.

This will mean of course caring for those who continue deal with the wounds and scars of conflict and so we as a community should be grateful and supportive of the work of War Widows, Legacy, RSL and continue to encourage the government to have an active and generous department of Veterans Affairs.

Recalling the cost should also push us as a society to seek wherever possible to avoid war and violence. In this world where injustice and evil seem to flourish there will be times when war is justified as right but remembering the cost will encourage us to see it only as the last resort.

One of my favourite TV programs of all time is the BBC comedy *Blackadder goes Forth*, which is based in WWI in 1917. In the final episode Blackadder's sidekick, Baldrick, asks why they are having a war. Captain Blackadder replies "It was just too much effort to not have a war." Sadly that has all too often been the case in history. The cost of war, graphically depicted in the end of the series when all the characters are

killed in another futile charge over the top, should encourage us to make every effort to not have a war. If we do not do this then perhaps we have forgotten.

The human faces and stories of which we are reminded each ANZAC Day then should not be forgotten.

But that is not really who is not to be forgotten. The phrase "Lest we forget" rose to prominence from a poem by Rudyard Kipling called *Recessional*. It was written after witnessing the naval review of 165 vessels at Spithead in 1897 as part of Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee. As he was overcome by the scale of military might he realised that despite such success this would all mean nothing and come to nothing, and lead to living meaningless lives if the nation forgot God.

So he wrote

*Lord God of Hosts be with us yet,
Lest we forget - lest we forget!*

In so doing he picked up the language of Deuteronomy 6 where God's people are urged to not forget all that God has done for his people and to continue to trust in him as their saviour.

We do well then as we remember those who have died in war to also remember God. Now obviously as a Christian minister I am likely to say this, but I say it for two very good reasons.

Firstly the God who is revealed in the Bible is not above the pain and suffering that we remember today. In Jesus, God entered into this world who showed compassion and care for those in need, particularly widows, he experienced loss and suffered greatly as he gave his life to show God's love for the world. It is to this God that we pray today, described in the Bible as the God of all compassion. We see this also in the beautiful image from Revelation of God wiping away every tear away from his people's eyes. It is hard to imagine a more intimate and caring picture. It is from this that will be best able to care for others knowing that God cares for us.

But not only does God understand, he is also a God who gives us hope. Both our readings today point to a day when God will act to restore the world and the tools of armoury will become tools of agriculture, when pain and death will be no more. How can we believe this in the face of such death and suffering that we see in our world? The Bible firmly says that we can believe this not simply because it will make us feel better and bring us comfort, but because of the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. This does not just give us a personal belief in a life after death, of eternal life, although it does that, but it does much more.

God's plan of salvation is much bigger; it is about restoring creation, restoring relationships between people and between God and humanity. It is about bringing peace, shalom, wholeness and completeness.

This is the biblical hope. It is a hope that I pray will give us true hope on this day. As we remember those who gave their lives for their country we should also remember the one who gave his life to save us all, to show God's love and ultimately bring us true peace. Lest we forget.

*The Very Rev'd Richard Humphrey
Dean of Hobart*