

St James United Church

Message for November 7, 2021 Remembrance Sunday



Preached by Rev. James Ravenscroft; Readings: Psalm 146

I confess that I struggle with this day. I blame my age. My dad was only five at the start of World War II and neither of my parents' fathers were called up. I have no personal loss connected to either world war or other conflicts. I say this to explain my reaction to an experience I had when in seminary. I was on student council, and in my role learned of local social action groups, including Project Ploughshares. That year they proposed putting a peace garden in Victoria Park. It seemed like a great idea but then a complaint came from the Legion. Members felt it was inappropriate in a park dedicated to the war dead. I was confused by this, thinking their comrades died trying to restore peace. I'm older now and realize that nothing's as black and white as it seemed then. The veterans were still grieving, still trying to make sense of their experience, and the garden felt to them a betrayal of their friends' memory and in many ways a judgment on their sacrifice as well.

That experience highlights the tension I feel at this time of year. I grieve the losses, the sacrifice made by our soldiers, and I want to support them. I also acknowledge the threat the world faced with the rise of fascism in the 30s. But I follow one we call "Prince of Peace". I read the gospels and find a call to love, to resist injustice and aggression but with non-violence. I also believe the words "Lest we forget" in part are to remind us that those who forget history will repeat it, something I fear given the tragedy of such death and destruction, plus how often a war leaves the world less secure than before. I think of two conflicts. Beyond the devastating impact on this province, with so many lives lost, families forever changed, economic repercussions, the First World War set in motion circumstances which led to the Second. Both laid the ground for ongoing issues in the Middle East, which connects to the second conflict. The War on Terror, which at first was focused on Afghanistan, in many ways destabilized an already unstable region. After 9/11, I feel we had no choice, but as the conflict expanded, the impact was sectarian violence in Iraq, ISIS, civil war in Syria, an emboldened Taliban. I don't know about you but seeing the Taliban back in power leaves me feeling like the deaths of 158 Canadians, and many more injured, were in vain.

Again, I realize it is complicated, leaving no easy answers, especially when innocent people are being harmed, even by their own leaders. We have a duty to help others, to protect them. It often feels like we have no choice. But as I read Psalm 146, I am reminded that it is only complicated in the how, not the what. Our focus must be on the most vulnerable – the widowed and orphaned, those hungry for food and thirsty for justice, often because of war, and because of divisive and prejudiced attitudes that feed it even in times of peace. We can heed that in regard to The War on Terror if we offer support to translators still in Afghanistan and the refugee families needing our help. But our lagging instead leaves me nodding with the Psalmist who says not to trust human princes, ironic given the tradition that King David wrote the psalms. He reminds us that our aim must be to find a path for peace and of justice for all, where mercy, not vengeance, informs the choices that we make. Will we go to war again? Perhaps. But we have other avenues to resolve conflicts, and very pressing global issues that need us to work together for the common good and not just national interests. When we do our lives are an act of praise to God who loves us, and those we name enemy, as we nurture the peace that I still believe that our soldiers died to restore.

With this in mind, I invite you to listen to the words of leaders from each corner of our world, who have glimpsed God's realm of peace. Listen now for the Spirit speaking.