

Looking Back and Looking Forward

Remembrance Sunday Yr C Micah 4, John 15 November 6, 2022

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A few years ago tulip bulbs were planted in front of the Antigonish Legion in recognition of the Anniversary of the liberation of the Netherlands in World War Two. While the bulbs were being planted someone who had been in Holland during the war spoke to the gardeners about how, during that last winter before Canadian troops liberated the country from the Nazi occupation, there was no food and they had to eat the tulip bulbs in order to keep from starving. A meal which, the gentlemen shared, was awful no matter how you looked at it.

This time of year we pause and remember. We put on poppies, we gather at cenotaphs, we lay wreaths. We think of relatives and friends, of neighbors and loved ones whose lives were changed by the horrors of the First and Second World Wars, of the Korean War, and of peacekeeping missions and Nato missions, and of Afghanistan.

We hear the names of places like Dieppe, Juno Beach , Kapyoung, Monte Cassino, Khandahar and Vimy Ridge. We listen to stories about those who went overseas in time of war and never returned. Of others who went overseas and returned broken in mind or body. Of families who shattered because of war. And we remember.

We remember those things not to glorify war but to recognize the reality of what war does to individuals, to families, to communities and our world. For Remembrance is important for us as citizens and as people of faith. Because our world is chaotic and uncertain. There is tension and conflict between nations. And we want peace in our world.

Which is why we need to remember and tell stories like the one I started with about tulip bulbs. Because in the comfort of our land where we are free to voice different opinions and disagree with our political leaders, where we don't have to worry about bullets and missiles when we leave our homes, it is easy and tempting to ignore the reality of what happens when communities and nations do not strive for peace.

Because history shows us very clearly that peace is not something that simply happens because the fighting stops. There no certainly of peace because guns go silent and troops pull back. Yes, when war stops it opens up the possibility for

peace but anyone who lived during the cold war knows that peace is not just the absence of armed conflict but something else.

Peace is when individuals have freedoms, rights, opportunities. When we resolve our disagreements without threats or fear or intimidation. When we ensure justice is a reality for everyone. Peace is when nations live together in harmony and work together to build a better future.

And remembrance reminds us that sometimes peace requires service and sacrifice. Which is why we remember the reasons men and women answered the call to service and made their choice to leave their families and go to the battle fields, to the seas, and into the air during war. And honestly this year with images of what is happening in Ukraine in our minds we better understand that sometimes there is no other option to bring about peace than to fight for a better world.

Which brings me to the symbol we use for remembrance, the poppy. This past summer we grew all of the flowers at home from seeds and I decided to plant some poppies as well. I knew poppies can be a difficult flower but I didn't realize how difficult it is to coax them to maturity until I tried.

I started with perhaps forty poppy seeds. I planted them and left them alone just like I did the other flowers which grew without a problem. But the poppies were a different story. Of the forty I planted only a dozen or so green shoots peaked out from the soil. And of that dozen only four plants grew to maturity and only two blossomed. They were beautiful bright red with the black centers almost identical to the ones we wear. And looking back I realize they needed more care and attention than I gave them. And if I had spent the time and effort on them then the whole garden would have been filled with red flowers.

Peace takes work. The peace we want in our world requires a commitment from us to become a reality. We can't just say we want it and then do nothing. We need to always be working to get along with each other. We have to listen, deal with the difficult issues, take the time and the effort to reconcile and repent in order to create the circumstances in which peace can flourish.

Because the vision which we read in the book of Micah reminds us that a better world is possible and that better world is what God desires. God calls us to a time

and a place where nations do not fight and kill, where we gather together as one people before God and live as God intends us to live on this earth. A time and a place where we work not to destroy but to build and create and grow.

Because when we talk about beating swords into plowshares we're not just using a powerful image that war can and should stop but we are expressing the truth that our efforts, our minds and bodies, have to be focused on building that better world we want. A world that in faith we know is not merely possibly but is something that God helps us to pursue and to seek for our lives and in our world.

For in our gospel lesson Jesus tells us how to build that world as individuals, and shows us in his life how to be the people who make peace a reality today. Caring for each other and letting love guide our actions. Being bold in our faith and not accepting anything other than the future that we know is possible start to happen today. Following Jesus in the way of service, sacrifice, and grace.

Because that vision from Micah begins when we take the time to listen to one another and when learn how to disagree with love and not anger guiding us. The dream of a better future takes root when we create possibilities and hope for those who have been crushed by what is happening in the world. The world changes from what is into what can be when we demand that there is justice, there is fairness, not just for us but for all people, and then we do everything we can to make that justice and fairness happen.

During this season of remembrance take the time and look back and remember what was. Hear the stories and think about what happened during the wars both in the battles abroad and here at home. Listen to the witness of those who were there and lived through those times and experiences. Know what was and recognize both the good and the bad of the days behind us. And then use that remembrance to strengthen and guide your faith today.

Let the faith of those who gave everything for peace help you pray for peace, work for peace, and build peace in your lives and in our world. Let their efforts motivate you to strive for reconciliation and join with them in demanding and accepting nothing less than a better world for everyone. A world where all people are respected and supported, a world where everyone is treated fairly and given the opportunity to flourish. A world that we know God calls us to proclaim and build.