

No Proxy Peace!

Micah 4¹⁻⁵; Amos 5¹⁸⁻²⁴; Psalm 70; 1 Thessalonians 4^{13-end}; Matthew 25¹⁻¹³

They shall beat their swords into ploughshares. (Micah 4³)

In preparing for leading the Act of Remembrance at the Grammar School - scratching around for something to say that makes people think - I was a little shocked by the statistics on deaths in conflict after WWII.

- ✦ In the 1990 Gulf War 45 were killed
- ✦ In the 2003 Iraq War 178 were killed
- ✦ In the 1982 Falklands War 237 were killed
- ✦ In the War in Afghanistan that ended in 2015 456 were killed

Whilst, most disturbingly

- ✦ In the conflict in Northern Ireland that came to an end in 2007 1,441 were killed.

How easily we hold things at arms length - almost if we have convinced ourselves that they don't affect us and we can't affect them. Yet, every year as I read the names on the memorial, as I come to JHA Linton, I find myself thinking how my predecessor, Bishop Linton, coped with that loss: for him the effects of war were not at arms' length - and very few homes didn't experience loss or grief or fear.

If we want our world to be a better, safer place where conflict is a thing of the past we have to accept that the trouble starts very close to home and that we can never ask anyone to do anything that we won't do ourselves.

Our first reading from Micah gives us three bits of advice:

- ✦ People of faith need to behave like people of faith. **Come let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; that he may teach us his ways and that we may walk in his paths.** God doesn't need show in our worship - Amos makes that clear - but he does need people of simple trust; committed to justice; and compassionate to one another. Faith isn't something we make up for ourselves, but it is allowing what we think and what we are to be decided by God - because only then does life and death make sense and only then can we be sure of hope (which is what Paul speaks about in his First Epistle to the Thessalonians).

- ✦ The greatest ideal of any Remembrance Sunday is contained in the words **they shall beat their swords into ploughshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more.** Yet, what we want from the nations we have to practice in our own small way. How do we turn conflict into opportunities for growth? The hint may be in the words that follow, **and no one shall make them afraid.** Fear makes people respond to defend themselves - the opposite of fear is *confidence*. If faith doesn't give us confidence it isn't worthy of its name and if it gives us confidence it also combats fear and that encourages peace.

- ✦ The final thing that Micah encourages is toleration. It may not be what you expect from the Old Testament, but it is there: **for all the peoples walk, each in the name of its god, but we will walk in the name of the Lord our God.** You don't have to agree with someone to respect them; you never have to concede what is important to you to accept a different view point; you can hold a conviction without needing everyone else to agree with you. I never want anyone to be ashamed of what they believe to be important but I will never apologise for what I believe to be true.

At Communion we will sing 'Make me a channel of your peace' and that is it. In God's name we learn the ways of peace that God wants to teach us.

This is the exact opposite of Devin Patrick Kelly walking into the 1st Baptist Church at Sutherland Springs in Texas and killed 26 people: that isn't God's way; it is an aggressive use of weapons; it doesn't respect anyone.

But then, it wasn't us - it doesn't really affect us.

But how often do we carry our anger or aggression with us to worship instead of living peace?

How easily we could use this opportunity to complain about the loud voices that lead the nations and hide from any responsibility to change the world behind their pointless rhetoric - but peace is never achieved at arms' length, there is no proxy peace.