

Nov 13 10.30 Remembrance Sunday John 14:15-end.

Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.

Peace, peace. When we meet together for the Lord's Supper, and we are asked to turn to our neighbours and give them a sign of peace, we are not wishing for them a quiet Sunday afternoon snooze, we are not wishing for them 'peace at any price', we are not even wishing for them a lack of war.

We are offering to them the 'peace that passes all understanding' we are offering to them the peace that Jesus gives to His disciples in the Upper room at the Last supper, only hours before His own execution on the Cross.

So what did Jesus mean by 'peace'? In the Jewish understanding, 'shalom', peace, is a complex and diverse sort of word. Not one that you can give a glib meaning to.

It means total wholeness of spirit as well as body.

It means sitting well in your body, at one with yourself.

It means wholeness, health, safety, rest and perfectness.

It is the word used to welcome another, or to wish them safety on their journey when they leave.

It also has a meaning concerning restoring things to their rightful owner.

So as we shake hands with our neighbour, we need to at least pick out a few of those ideas to be asking God to give to them.

Today we come together to consider and remember those that went to war and didn't come back the same as they went. They went with the desire to help their fellow human beings, to change the world, to put right the wrongs, but if they returned, and so many have not, they have come home changed, both physically and mentally, and in the core of their souls.

Whether our side won or not, we are all changed, because we are not at peace with the other side.

Whether the war was necessary or not, we are impoverished, simply because we are not at peace.

As Jimmy Carter said:

War may sometimes be a necessary evil. But no matter how necessary, it is always an evil, never a good. We will not learn how to live together in peace by killing each other's children.

And Gandhi also put it this way:

what difference does it make to the dead, the orphans and the homeless, whether the mad destruction is wrought under the name of totalitarianism or the holy name of liberty or democracy?

Our Lord's teaching centred on the Love of God, not on the wrath of God. He was concerned about what would happen to His disciples when nations turned in on themselves, and all bystanders would be vulnerable. And Jesus was very aware that the Romans of His time, were likely to crush the Jewish nation within a few years of His ministry, but His teaching didn't flow from that knowledge, it flowed from the will of His Father, that all may be one, and that all His followers would love not only one another, but also their enemies.

That love for enemies is not one of sentiment or sloppiness, sometimes it is tough love, meeting out reprimands and rebukes. It is looking at the world, with its greed and violence and saying: enough is enough.

As we remember those that gave so much that we should be able to live in freedom and safety, we should ensure that they did not give themselves in vain, and that the world really is a better place. A place of care for others, even if they are not like us, or even if they do not like us; a place where there is enough of everything to go round, if no one is greedy; a place where each person is valued as a son of God, whether or not he or she believes in God; a place where a child will be loved and cared for without exploitation by the more powerful.

Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those that trespass against us. Not an impossible command from Jesus when He taught us to pray, but an absolute necessity if we are to live in love with others. We often think that we can't change our feelings about others that have hurt us, but Jesus wasn't telling us to change an airy fairy thing like a feeling when He wanted us to forgive others, He wanted us to act out our forgiveness, with right behaviour, not with revenge; He wanted us to step closer to the enemy, with the hand of reconciliation, not to stab them in the back. That's the sort of forgiveness required, the sort that love's its enemies and does good to those that persecutes it.

And none of this is done without help from on high, as Jesus said in the Upper Room; the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you. Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. ... Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.