

**Sunday 14<sup>th</sup> November 2021 – Remembrance Sunday ‘War and peace’**  
**(Psalm 46, Matt 11:25-30)**

We live in a culture which is increasingly comfortable with the language of war. We use it to describe any intense initiative designed to confront particular challenges: so we have the war on crime, war on drugs, war on poverty, war on inequality, and so on. Sporting contests will talk about ‘going into battle’ for your team. We even use the language of army life in the way we describe our jobs. When our bosses appear at a meeting, we might joke about the arrival of the ‘heavy artillery’; those of us not in senior leadership complain that our managers have no idea what it’s like ‘in the trenches’.

We’ve even co-opted a term which was coined during the First World War as one of our key pieces of vocabulary for the pandemic: ‘frontline workers’ – which, when you think about it, is a very striking metaphor when you consider what the original frontline meant for those who lived and fought in it.

The English language is an incredibly rich and diverse one, and at one level there is value in using evocative terms and imagery. However, I also wonder if the very casual way in which we use such language reflects how distant most of us are from the true reality of actual war. A couple of weeks ago I took the funeral for a lady who started her apprenticeship in London in 1940, literally a few days before the Blitz started. She travelled on the train into London with a friend, but they both agreed that if either of them were not there on the platform one day, the other would go into London on the assumption that something had happened to their friend – which is code language for: they’d been caught in a bomb and killed. These were 14-year-old girls, and this was their daily reality.

Not many of us born after, say, 1950 have any real idea what living in a real war is like – and that’s before we talk about those who have actually fought and served in conflicts. What we now call Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (or PTSD) is sadly a common outcome for many who put themselves in situations of intense danger to serve their country or their cause.

War has, tragically, been part of human society and culture almost from the beginning. Way back in the fourth chapter of the bible, Lamech boasted about the humans he would kill in revenge for being attacked, and things have gone in similar fashion ever since. Conflict was a common danger for God’s people throughout the Old Testament: sometimes as aggressors, more often as vulnerable victims of larger nations and tyrants around them. Psalm 46 describes the aftermath of one such rescue, as the people celebrated peace and gave thanks to God.

The psalm vividly describes the sense of destabilisation that conflict causes: it’s as if ‘the earth gives way and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea... Nations are in uproar and kingdoms fall.’

**It is the human condition: but it is not the divine purpose.** God’s plan is to ‘make wars cease to the ends of the earth, to break the bow and shatter the spear.’ And this God is painted in both great and intimate terms. He is our refuge and strength, the one whose voice speaks over the earth: ‘Be still, and know that I am God.’ And yet he is also with us, an ever-present help – God is not just discharging his duties from command headquarters, he is there with us on the frontline, in our hearts.

On this day we rightly remember all those who still face the consequences and the horror of war – both those who serve, those whose loved ones are involved and also those innocent casualties of war, even those who are caught up in other people's conflicts. We give thanks for the peace our nation has enjoyed for many years, and continue to pray for peace around the world.

And yet **we also find ourselves asking the question: what is it that leads to real peace?** How is it that so often we find ourselves led back into war and conflict? The biblical answer is that true peace only comes when we find the sort of inner peace that only Christ can bring. When we are at peace with God and with ourselves, we are more able to live at peace with others. We can break the cycles of revenge and retaliation, we think less about rights and more about responsibilities, we can turn the other cheek and so undermine the self-righteous behaviour of the aggressor.

In our gospel reading **Jesus talks about this kind of peace: 'Come unto me, all you who are weary and heavy laden and I will give you rest.'** In Christ's love we find a different identity, and a new security. 'My yoke is easy and my burden is light,' Jesus says – and the burden he is referring to is a life determined by rules and regulations, as well as the pride and need to be right that comes with it. The life of grace and peace is different. It is less about what we get than what we give, it seeks to mediate and not compete, it protects the vulnerable rather than rewards the powerful.

This kind of life may not solve every war, but it would dramatically reduce the conflict in our world, and the pain which such conflicts bring. And today of all days, as we recommit ourselves to being peacemakers, *may we hear that voice again, the voice of dependence and trust, the voice which allows us to live at peace with our maker, with ourselves and with others: 'Be still and know that I am God.'*

Amen.