

13th November 2022 – Remembrance Sunday Reflection: Isaiah 9 ‘To end all wars’

In August 1914, famous author and social commentator H. G. Wells published a series of articles in London newspapers that subsequently appeared as a book. The book was entitled ‘*The War That Will End War*’. Wells argued that a decisive defeat of Germany was the only way for Britain and the world to respond in order to establish long-term peace.

Wells’ phrase immediately became popular, and was later adapted into the form we use now: ‘The war to end all wars.’ As we know, such confidence has proved tragically misplaced. Indeed, even during the First World War itself, the phrase met with some degree of scepticism. After the Armistice, as it became apparent that the war had not succeeded in ending war, the phrase took on a more cynical tone. British staff officer Archibald Wavell, a future field marshal and viceroy of India, said despondently of the Paris Peace Conference in 1919 and 20: ‘After the “war to end war”, they seem to have been pretty successful in Paris at making the “Peace to end Peace”.’

Sadly, far from ending wars, what was known at the time as the Great War led just twenty years later to an even more global conflict, and the horrendous evil of the holocaust. H.G Wells’ phrase continued to haunt conflicts throughout the twentieth century – U.S. President Richard Nixon, in his "Silent Majority" speech of 1969, said, ‘I do not tell you that the war in Vietnam is the war to end wars.’ Which was just as well.... (PAUSE)

On Remembrance Sunday we gather to remember all those affected by war: those who gave their lives, those who are left to grieve, those who continue to face trauma because of war. **We also recommit ourselves to the cause of peace. However, Wells’ phrase prompts us to ask: how on earth is this possible?** What can possibly disrupt the human brokenness that leads to war? This year of all years, war has entered Europe again, and there are numerous countries around the world still torn apart by long-term conflicts.

The poem we just showed asks the same fundamental question: ‘What ceases war? The pressing question – what can halt inborn aggression? ...Can terror end all terror now? Brute force subdue itself and bow? Can darkness drive out darkened dread? Death extinguish death instead? We need to interrupt the spiral – find the anti-retroviral.’

Remembrance Sunday always challenges us to recognise that **what we mourn is not just out there, but in here.** We all carry the capacity for good and evil, and face those universal human temptations that lead to what the poet calls ‘inborn aggression’: pride, vanity, a desire for revenge. If only we could we could get a booster jab for those? Where do we find the anti-retroviral, the game-changer, the breakthrough?

Our passage from Isaiah tells where to look. **The answer he says, is not within ourselves – something – or rather Someone – has to break in from the outside.** ‘To us a child is born...’ and this newcomer is more than just a human: ‘Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.’ God breaks into our world, the Word becomes flesh and moves into the neighbourhood.

We often read this glorious passage in Advent and at Christmas, but sometimes we miss its more radical words. The Prince of Peace is not just about inner peace, important though that is (and how we need that at the moment, too) – the verse that precedes it says this: ‘Every warrior’s boot used in battle and every garment rolled in blood will be destined for burning, will be fuel for the fire.’ The Prince of Peace comes to bring reconciliation on every level.

For sure, there are times when that peace seems as far away as ever – but **it is the birth, life, death and resurrection of the Son of God that interrupts the spiral.** One day God will put all things decisively right, and usher in the fullness of the reign of eternal peace. Until then, we continue to pray for human hearts to change, and for the life, teaching and example of the Prince of Peace to be lifted up, not just out there, but *in here*:

Crown him the prince of peace, whose power a sceptre sways, from pole to pole that wars may cease, and all be prayer and praise. Amen.