

## **Being the Church at Brentwood**

### **Lest We Forget**

**Ps 16 & Hebrews 10:19-25  
(800, 428, 801, 420)**

**November 11, 2012**

Let's recall again  
the situation that the Preacher to the Hebrews is addressing.

The church or churches to who he is speaking and writing are in distress.  
They are discouraged and dispirited.  
They are depressed and divided.

In images that often seem strange to us,  
the Preacher reminds his listeners and readers  
that their hope lies in Jesus Christ.  
Through Jesus Christ, God has been true to his promises.  
He has saved humanity from its deepest distress,  
from being separated from the true source of their being in God.  
God's faithfulness to his promises –  
essentially, fear not, I will be with you –  
is the only true source of hope for humanity  
as we seek to recognize more fully the true source of our flourishing.

What the Preacher wants us to remember  
is the true source of our hope.  
That hope is grounded in the faithfulness of God –  
faithful to his original purpose  
to enjoy the good company of human beings  
as the community of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit  
delight in the abundant variety of this unfolding creation.

At the 11<sup>th</sup> hour of the 11<sup>th</sup> day of the 11<sup>th</sup> month of 1918,  
the guns that had shredded the hopes of generations for four years  
fell silent as Germany signed the Armistice.  
New hopes emerged for an era of peace –  
for the peaceful resolution of the kinds of disputes  
that led to the outbreak of war four years earlier.

Over the past 94 years, those fresh hopes for peace  
have been dashed over and over again.  
The punitive injustices inflicted on Germany  
in the Armistice and the subsequent peace treaties  
led to the rise of Hitler in the early 1930s  
and eventually to the outbreak of the Second World War.  
Decade after decade over the past century has be plagued  
by new wars around the world,  
each one introducing new ways of humans killing humans  
out of fear and desire for domination.

I know this is a harsh judgement.  
Perhaps it is too harsh.  
I know Christians are urged not to judge,  
lest they be judged themselves.

But I can't imagine the God we have come to know in Jesus Christ -  
who created all of humanity -  
who saw that it was good,  
who came in Jesus Christ to suffer and die for our future flourishing,  
who remains at work among us and within us through the work of the Spirit  
spreading love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness,  
faithfulness, humility, and self-control –  
I cannot imagine that God condones the kinds of wars we have seen  
over the course of human history.

So, I approach Remembrance Day each year in a spirit of confession –  
confession of the fear and the desire for dominating control  
that too often lead to war.  
This is the way people become  
when they lose touch with the true source of their being  
in God's loving delight and creativity.  
This is the way people become  
when they ignore the presence and power of this God  
within them and among them.  
This is the way people become  
when they lose reverence for God and makes gods of themselves.

With sincere confession, Christians believe,  
comes an increased awareness of God's forgiveness.  
With sincere confession  
comes a deeper acknowledgement of the forgiveness  
we are offered in the work of Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit,  
enabling us to try different ways to resolve conflicts.  
With sincere confession  
comes a more profound determination to serve

God's reign of Shalom/Peace with all our heart, and mind, and soul.

I also approach Remembrance Day each year with realism.

There are times, in the midst of sinful human conflicts,  
when going to war or taking up arms is the lesser of two evils.

Presbyterians, as a branch of Christ's church,  
take the thinking through of our faith seriously.

We spend a lot of time in conversation with each other  
discerning the meaning of God's Word for the times in which we live.  
Following the Second World War and in the midst of the Korean War,

Canadian Presbyterians thought seriously  
about the relationship of the church and the state,  
especially in the light of the kinds of totalitarianism  
found in Nazism and the various Communisms of that time.

The result of those conversations is our  
*Declaration of Faith Concerning Church and Nation.*

It recognizes that armed resistance to forms of tyranny  
is at times necessary,  
but must always be undertaken with humble and sincere confession,  
with reverence for the Lordship of Jesus Christ  
and the kind of freedom he alone offers.

Here are the words of that section of the *Declaration*:

*It is the Church's duty to denounce and resist every form of tyranny, political, economic, or ecclesiastical, especially when it becomes totalitarian. A citizen is not barred from disowning any government or organ of power which usurps the sovereignty of Jesus Christ, and indeed may be obliged by God's word to rebel against it. But if involved in such action, the Church must remember that the weapons of her warfare are finally out of this world. Led by the Holy Spirit she will in any situation bear public witness to the absolute Lordship of Jesus Christ and to the freedom of all men in Him.*

Christians never go to war out of blind loyalty to their state.  
Christians never go to war out of blind hatred for the enemy.  
Christians never go to war without sorrow and grief  
that this action seems necessary at the time.  
Christians never go to war without wanting to end war.

Every Remembrance Day for the last 34 years,  
I have remembered Cam Sylvester.  
He was a member at Glebe Presbyterian Church,  
the congregation I ministered with in Toronto from 1978 – 1985.  
Cam always came to church in his Legion blazer.  
He had fought in the First World War – went overseas in 1916.  
He remained a proud soldier all his life.

But I remember his words when we first talked about that war.  
“It was hell,” he said sadly, “just hell.”  
Then his eyes glazed over and he remained silent for a long time,  
gently shaking his head back and forth.

It was a powerful testimony to the reality of war,  
one I will never forget.

On Remembrance Day, then,  
I think it is right that we honour those who served and are serving,  
those who died in struggles against tyranny for the freedoms we enjoy,  
and those whose lives have been maimed and marred  
by the ravages of battle.  
They deserve our gratitude and praise.  
They should not be forgotten.

Equally, if not more, important, however,  
is to remember where true hope is found  
in this war-torn world.  
It is not in the weapons of this world,  
but in the grace and mercy that all humanity has been given in Jesus Christ.  
That grace and mercy brings all peoples together  
as brothers and sisters of Jesus Christ,  
as beloved children of God.  
That grace and mercy, as the Preacher in Hebrews says so powerfully,  
helps us be concerned for one another,  
helps us show love to one another and do good.

At our best in the past,  
that is what we have fought for.  
For our best in the future,  
we should continue to fight for this  
using the ‘weapons’ of faith and hope and love.

Amen

Preached by the Rev. Dr. Brian Fraser  
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