

Reading – Matthew 5 v1-12

Talk – “Fight for Peace”- Rev John

My recollection of Remembrance Sundays, was of attending church with the cubs, petrified that I had lost my poppy, not really sure what all the fuss was about, listening to a minister speak, that really didn't make much sense, and waiting for the minister to say, the Benediction at the end. Then parading up to the war memorial, more often than not in the pouring rain for more words from a minister.

Perhaps you young people are sitting there thinking the same. When will he finish? I promise you, I'll keep it as brief as possible.

Our generation, since the Second World War, have been privileged, we have lived through a time of relative peace, and we haven't experienced the horrors of war that past generations faced.

On our windows in this church are etched designs of the first and Second World War. On the front of the church as you enter under the archway are names of young people who left this community to fight for their country and never returned. These are the horrors of war of a past generation, and their sacrifice brought us freedom and peace.

This year, war has come a step nearer to us in the shape of Russia and Ukraine. It has crept onto our continent. We have all been made aware of the threat to our freedom and democracy. We fight with bigger and more damaging weapons than our forefathers ever did. The potential that is at hand to cause massive damage to the planet and civilisation is frightening.

In the midst of it all, what does God say to us?

Well, God speaks through his Son Jesus, who said, “Blessed are the peacemakers” and suddenly today these words have a ring of urgency about them. Peace is not a given, but something which has to be worked for, and even fought for, something which needs to be made; Jesus calls them peacemakers.

If there is anything worth fighting for, it's peace.

That sounds like a contradiction of terms, but lasting peace needs to be fought for. That is why it is important to remember Jesus' words, “Blessed are the peacemakers for they will be called the Children of God.”

Peace is not just the cessation of war; peace means justice and freedom and dignity for all.

This country has relative peace; we can walk the streets and go about our business with no fear of bombs and bullets, but under the surface, if we look closely enough, there is suffering, and people do not have peace in their lives.

None of us, can rest secure, even in this seemingly peaceful country. Look at what happened in an estate in Dundee, just a week ago when it became like a war zone with fireworks, anarchy and vandalism.

Christians have a duty to fight the good fight, to carry on a fight against injustice; so that our world becomes a place where fear of violence and crime are in the past, and a place of justice in which all can live in dignity. If peace is to mean anything, then it must mean a world in which everyone is reunited with each other and with their Creator.

That is exactly what Jesus came to do and that is why he is called the Prince of Peace. He gave his life on a cross that we might know the peace of God. He gave his life that we would know forgiveness and have eternal life.

Peace is a process and the working through of processes takes a long time. In all of the troubled places and in our own country there is much to do.

Today is a day for remembering, a day for strengthening our resolve to work and fight for peace and justice, and it is also a day for silence.

Matthew 6 v5-15

Talk – “Peace starts with us” – Rev John

The Eighth of November 1987, Enniskillen, Northern Ireland.

Remembrance Day.

The father and daughter stood close together for the open air service at the War Memorial, for it was cold and windy. But the weather hadn't put them off coming. They both wanted to pay their respects to those who had died, not just in the wars, but in the more recent troubles in their own land. There'd been so much bloodshed, so much suffering.

The father, Gordon Wilson, a shopkeeper in the town, knew there was no easy solution to the differences between Catholics and Protestants, but why, oh why, did innocent people have to die? Bombs in buildings, bombs in cars, you never knew where the terrorists would plant one next. And what for?

He looked round. He hoped the police had searched the area properly. But no, surely at a service honouring the dead, surely they would have the decency not to strike here.

He always stood in this spot for the service, by the wall of an old building. He was pleased his youngest daughter Marie could be with him this year. She was twenty, a nurse at a hospital in Belfast, home for the weekend. He was so proud of her, so proud.

Then it happened. The world seemed to explode around them. The wall shuddered, then fell on top of them. The unthinkable had come true; a bomb exploded, just by where they were standing. Gordon was thrown forward, then felt a pounding on his back as the rubble piled on top of him.

He was aware of screaming all around him, but he could do nothing about it. Then he felt a hand coming through the rubble, grabbing his. Marie's hand. They were together and they were alive. He heard her shout out that she loved him before her hand seemed to lose its grip.

Father and daughter were pulled out from under the broken wall and rushed to hospital. Gordon had injured his shoulder. But Marie's injuries were far worse, and later that day, she died.

The family members – Gordon, his wife Joan, and two other children – comforted each other, gave each other strength to go on. But they were aware of someone else comforting them too, someone with his arms wrapped right round them. God was there, suffering with them.

Catholics and Protestants were able to come together and comfort the families of the eleven people who had died in the blast. They knew that true Christians, whatever church they went to, hated the violence, and were sad that people might blame God for it.

But Gordon didn't blame God – he knew that God is love. And he didn't need to take revenge either, for he knew that God himself would judge the terrorists in his own time. And he believed he would see Marie again in heaven.

Over the next days Gordon was interviewed on radio and TV. People were astonished at his lack of hatred and bitterness.

More and more invitations to speak poured in, not only from Ireland, but from other countries too. People listened who had lost loved ones, who were finding it difficult to go on, who felt God had forsaken them, who were full of bitterness. And Gordon, this shopkeeper from a little town, showed them they could go on, that God had not forsaken them and never would, and that being bitter wouldn't help. He brought them comfort and hope.

But he wanted to do more. He wanted to help bring peace to his country. He accepted an invitation to join the Irish parliament so he could plead with the country's leaders for a united, peaceful Ireland.

Little by little things did change. As Gordon and others spoke, people began to see they had to put the hurts and hatred of the past behind them and think about the future. And eventually, on Good Friday 1998, a peace treaty was signed.

But Gordon Wilson was not there to see it. He had died peacefully three years before.

After his death people from all over the world wrote to his widow saying how much Gordon had meant to them. He had not just told them the best way to cope with loss, but shown them as well. God had helped him, and he had passed on that help to others.

So Marie's death had not been in vain.

In Jesus' famous prayer, we discover that he is teaching them to pray for peace.

The first petition is to pray for God's Kingdom to come into the world. A Kingdom where Jesus, the Prince of Peace will reign forever. This should be our daily prayer, that his Kingdom will come into our lives, into our church, into our communities, into our nation and into our world.

What if we made this our simple prayer every day for Ukraine, "Our father in heaven hallowed be your name, may your kingdom come in Ukraine as it is in heaven."

That's a prayer that could change this war.

God's Kingdom and his will are closely connected. When we pray for his Kingdom to come, what we are really praying for is that his will, will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

What is God's will – Micah 6 – “To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.” Simply that everyone lives in peace; three things, act justly....love mercy and walk humbly.

When we do these things, we become peacemakers and peace comes into our lives.

The Kingdom of God is about God's will lived out in the lives of his people, here on earth, right now!

You see, we all have the potential to be peacemakers and this comes about through allowing God's spirit into our lives.

The Kingdom is not something which has primarily to do with nations and peoples and countries. It has something which has to do with each one of us. The Kingdom is in fact the most personal thing in the world. The Kingdom demands the submission of my will, my heart, my life. It is only when each of us make our personal decision and submission that the Kingdom comes.

Chinese Christians pray the well know prayer, “Lord revive your church, beginning with me.” And we might well paraphrase that and say, Lord bring in your Kingdom and begin with me.

Peace will come when we recognise our common humanity – religion can divide – but following Jesus is not religion, it's relationship, and by following Jesus, we are brought closer to his Father in heaven.

Jesus had much to say about those on the outside – even their enemies. He taught them to love their enemies. He showed by example that God's love was much wider than man reckons and that we should see Christ in the stranger and the outcast and the foreigner.

On this day, as we think about war and what divides us; may we also take time to consider what unites and makes us stronger and that begins with us being peacemakers.

But we need God to help us and that's why we sing,

Make me a channel of your peace.