

Remembering... Remembrance Sunday

It was difficult to choose only one reading for today, as Remembrance Sunday. And after sitting with the three potential readings: Micah 4.1-5, Romans 8.31-39 and John 15.9-17, I decided on Micah.

Micah is one of the "minor prophets" who wrote and lived in the second half of the 8th Century. He was born in 740 BCE. He is considered the 6th of the 12 Minor Prophets of the Hebrew Scriptures.

You may be wondering why I chose such an ancient text to talk about Remembrance Sunday. Micah writes "...they shall beat their swords into ploughshares, their spears in to pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more; but they shall sit under their own vines and under their own fig trees, and no one shall make them afraid". (Micah 4.3-4, NRSV)

You see, as long as there has been humanity, there has been some form of disagreement. As long as there has been neighbouring tribes and communities, there have been land disputes. And as long as there have been weapons, there has been war.

There has never been a time when the world was completely at peace. The earliest recorded time of war was 9700 BCE, just after the end of the Ice Age. The longest war on record was the Iberian Religious War, known as the Reconquista, from 718 to 1492, lasting 781 years. The Great War began in 1914 and ended in 1918 in what was hoped to be the last war. And yet it wasn't.

I remember learning about the First and Second World Wars, Korea, Vietnam and Canada's Peacekeepers in school. I felt fortunate to not have been alive during the First and Second World Wars and Korea. Canada felt very removed from hostilities in Vietnam. And then there was the Cold War which lasted from 1947-1991.

We have not learned from the Prophet Micah. He wrote of war 1300 years ago, and while we yearn for peace, we're not yet there. Micah wrote of a time when "Nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more".

The art of warcraft has been developing since the dawn of time. Weapons have moved beyond bullets to chemicals, from nuclear to bio-weapons. The days of seeing your enemy in the trenches are over. Now, warcraft looks more like a video game on a screen as drone strikes drop "smart" bombs on buildings around the globe from where the command centre is watching. When will it end?

Why do we remember?

I come from a long military history, mostly Royal Air Force. I tried to sign up when I graduated from my Undergraduate degree in 1991, but I failed both the physical (hearing) test and the psychological test. I wanted, in 1991, to be a stretcher-bearer, but those positions ceased to be after the Second World War. You see, I wanted to fight

for my country but was unwilling to hold or fire a weapon.

I believed then, as I do now, that fighting for peace is like shouting for silence.

I was unsuccessful in my bid to serve my country through the military, but I joined the Royal Canadian Legion at age 19 and have been a member, almost continuously since then. I have been the Chaplain of Branch 36, Fernie Legion since 2017. Every year I work with the group putting together the Remembrance Day service.

Traditionally, the service would be at the Cenotaph, on the grounds of the Courthouse and would begin with a parade marching in. The Fernie Academy would have singers and then there would be a reflection from Jennifer Cronin, Past President of the Legion, wreaths would be laid, I'd be asked to offer a prayer and then we'd sing God Save the Queen and parade back to the Legion for an ecumenical service. At 2:00 pm a group of us would go to Rocky Mountain Village for a small service there. It was a rich and full day.

This year will be completely different. Originally we were planning to be at the Cemetery, a small contingency, by invitation only. The Branch would be open for veterans and members to gather and watch the livestream. And as Rocky Mountain Village is still on lockdown, we are unable to gather there. Following the Cemetery Service, there was to be a short ecumenical service at the Legion before the bar was opened for a brief time of celebration and remembrance.

On the 6th of November an edict was received from the Royal Canadian Legion, BC/Yukon Command, that all indoor events and all Legion Branches should be closed on Wednesday 11th of November. The Command President Val McGregor stated "Although we cannot come together as we normally would, we can still take the time to Remember our Comrades on the 11th, and encourage others to do the same". (Memo 104.20)

Now, while this is not what anyone wants to have happen, in order to keep our Veterans, Members and the public safe, it's what must happen. 2020 is turning into a year of firsts. Our first Holy Week, online. Same with Easter Day. Our First Anniversary service online. Our first Thanksgiving in a blended Worship, with a few people in the building and the majority joining online.

Yesterday I baptised a baby with 12 people present, in the Church, all wearing face masks, and standing in 2's and 3's maintaining a 6 foot radius.

Next Saturday I am presiding a wedding at Knox United. It will be my first wedding at Knox and my first COVID-19 protocol wedding. There will be 20 guests, plus the bride and groom, wedding party and myself.

My prayer is, as we look back, a decade from now, we will remember the time when we did our best, despite fear and anxiety. When we made difficult decisions for the good of the community and to keep our most vulnerable safe.

Why do we gather for Remembrance Day? What's the big deal? If we do not remember

our past, we are doomed to repeat it, wrote George Santayana in 1905. And it is true.

Micah is writing of an idyllic time when people would come together with no need for war. They would change their weapons of war into gardening tools and would gather together in peace. We've been talking about this for 13 centuries and we aren't there yet. So why bother?

Because, my brothers and sisters, we must remember those who have given their lives that other's may live. Those men and women who joined up to speak for the voiceless, to liberate the oppressed, to return chaos to order.

I may be naive and idealistic, but I truly believe if we each make the decision to live our lives from love first, we can, and we will, change the world. If we trust in God to be with us in good times as well as in bad times, we can find the strength to choose love.

If each of us makes the decision to strive for the world in which Micah wrote, we, too, can beat our swords into ploughshares, our spears into pruning hooks. We can sit together, each under our own fig tree and reminisce about the times when we had to wear a mask everywhere we went.

When we were unable to touch our loved ones. When we disinfected every surface in our homes and workplaces and waited for a vaccine against a horrible, global pandemic.

And even though Remembrance Day will look very different from previous years, we will still gather, as we are allowed. We will come together to remember them. In the immortal words of Laurence Binyon, from his 1914 poem "For the Fallen",

They shall grow not old, as we that are left grow old,
Age shall not weary them, nor the years condemn,
at the going down of the sun and in the morning,
We will remember them. We will remember them.

Amen.

The Reverend Andrea L. Brennan
Knox United Church & Christ Church Anglican
8 November 2020
Remembrance Sunday
Micah 4.1-5