

In the Hebrew Scriptures the people of God were forever being called by God to remember – to remember who they were, where they had come from – and it was usually at times in their collective life when things were going wrong. But that call to remember was not only about reminding themselves how they had got into their current situation, it was also a call, a promise to a future that would be different.

On this day of remembrance, we are reminded that war has indeed touched our lives as Canadians. We are reminded that war has shaped us, and war has consequences and sacrifices that affect us all. As Canadians we can be proud of those who went to war. Yet we are not defined as a warrior nation.

We are a country that calls itself a peacemaker. War has shaped us, but war is not our sole narrative. Events do shape us, but so do our choices about what those events mean to us, and how we shall live as a result of those events. You and I get to choose.

Friends, let us take seriously that peace is the narrative of our lives. Of all the veterans I have known, and to whom I have ministered over the years, this is what they have asked me to remember. They have wanted us to remember the sacrifice offered for peace. They desired for us a world of peace.

To remember rightly today is to seek peace and pursue it. Friends, the yearning for peace is timeless and universal. All people want peace for themselves and for their children. It is a longing that is deep within the human heart.

Peace is one of the great and enduring themes of the Bible. This yearning for peace was part of Israel's hope. Other than for a brief period of time, Israel had never known peace. Buffeted by powerful empires – Egypt, Assyria, Babylon – Israel was invaded, occupied, held hostage, and sent into exile. And all the while the hope for a day of peace would not die. God means for there to be peace, a peace not based on military victory, but on justice, in the fair, equal, compassionate treatment of all people.

One of the most eloquent expressions of that yearning is found in the 11<sup>th</sup> chapter of Isaiah. The scene is one of utter desolation; the land has been laid waste, the trees shattered, broken. Isaiah sees a stump. There are many stumps on battlefields, a symbol of desolation, defeat and death.

But wait! the prophet commands. Look around! Out of that dried-up stump, a green shoot, a shoot of Jesse, who was King David's father. Incredibly, out of the symbol of death, life, newness, creation continuing. The prophet sees a vision, a precious vision, of the coming day of the Lord: creation healed, brutality gone, old enemies reconciled,

everything put right.

*“The wolf shall live with the lamb, the leopard shall lie down with the kid, the calf and the lion and the fatling together ...”*

The imagery is startling. It is almost impossible to imagine. These animals are natural adversaries. One is the predator and the other, prey. Isaiah envisions a reorganization of creation with all the brutality and violence left out.

Isaiah was not only talking about the circle of life. He was talking about the human community.

The people to whom Isaiah was writing knew what it meant to be hunted. The kingdoms of Assyria and then of Babylon had them in their sights, and there was nothing that would stop their pounce.

But even more than this, Isaiah reminds the people that they had, in fact, been devouring each other. The powerful in their midst had turned their backs on any call for justice or compassion. Anyone who was vulnerable could be exploited. Anyone who was weak was fair game, and anyone who was defenseless was doomed.

Friends, predator and prey are not just out there. They are within us as well. You and I are each some measure of both. We experience that regularly. It is in the expressions we use, in the images that we carry in our heads. We say we live in a dog-eat-dog world. It is eat or be eaten. We try to stay on top. In its most extreme human manifestation, it shows up as war.

Why? Part of this is fear. Fear is a powerful motivator, and vigilance is our primary relational stance. We would rather be predator than prey.

And yet, deep within ourselves, we also long for something else. We long for the reign of peace that Isaiah is describing. We long for a shift from the vigilance that keeps us restless, to the watchfulness that looks toward promise. So Isaiah offers us what is called the prophetic imagination. Along with all the predator-prey images, Isaiah offers an alternative. He invites us to dream of a world where predator and prey is no longer the nature of the relationship. The animals which have an inherent alienation to each other and see each other as food rather than friends, shall become friends rather than foragers.

Peace is the message of that vision. Reconciliation and harmony is its consequence. Isaiah's vision is inherently unbelievable, and at the same time it is the symbolic promise of that kind of radical change which God intends for us. It is, on the one hand, apparently impossible, but on the other hand, it is our only real hope.

How then do we live in such a vision for peace, so overwhelming in its claim?

Like the five wise bridesmaids in today's gospel, we prepare for it. We look for it - we watch for it - we wait expectantly for it. And we do so by how we choose to live our lives. We have choices to make, challenges to meet, as we dedicate ourselves, our energies, and our lives to that which is good and just and peace-filled.

How are we to live?

Let me suggest that we move from the large vision to the small daily discipline of living out the meaning of our faith.

This requires that we decrease that which is destructive, that which limits us, and increase that which is life-affirming, so that the spirit of peace may grow in us.

Therefore –

Let us decrease what is greedy in our lives, the self-serving, the need to control others. And let us increase sharing, generosity and compassion, the ability to see others as people who also have their desires and needs.

Let us decrease what is fearful and defensive, the unresolved angers and frustrations in our lives. And let us increase trust, openness, and the desire to seek solutions.

Let us decrease what is false and untruthful in our lives, the illusions we hold, the prejudices, biases. And increase honesty, honesty about ourselves, our neighbours, honesty about our society and our role in the injustices of society.

Let us decrease what is hateful and alienating in our lives. And let us increase healing and forgiveness, which ultimately are the only source of life.

Our faith basks in great promises, promises of peace and justice for all peoples, where the *“wolf shall live with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid, the calf and the lion and the fatling together...!”* We pray for this day to come.

In the meantime, there are daily disciplines, day-to-day tasks, work that requires time and intentionality. As we work toward Isaiah's vision of peace, we will notice the fulfilment of the promise, the increase of sharing, of compassion, of generosity, of hope, of truth-telling, healing and forgiveness.

Friends, may we live that for which we hope. It will make all the difference in the world.

May this be our solemn vow: *“To take each moment and live each moment, in peace eternally. Let there be peace on earth and let it begin with me.”*

(Sy Miller and Jill Jackson)          Amen

## Pastoral Prayer

Let us pray

Merciful God, our refuge and strength, a very present help in time of trouble, we come to worship you on this day set aside for the purpose of remembering: remembering deeds of great courage carried out on our behalf; remembering great sacrifices made by men and women just like ourselves; remembering a great and terrible fear that once stalked the earth; remembering a great deliverance from that fear; remembering that you are with us all the days of our lives, good and bad.

Let us give thanks for the freedom that is ours as a nation. But keep us also aware of the responsibility that goes with our memories - to use our freedom wisely and well, knowing its price and value; to put away all attitudes that make conflict and war inevitable; to treat one another with respect and dignity. Loving God, may this day of remembrance bring us to do your will that we may live as your people in this our day.

On this day we remember that others live where war, violence and injustice are facts of daily life. We ask for your presence to be with them in their struggles. And we ask that you be with us that we may better understand their pain and move in our own lives to change what we do that might contribute to their pain.

We remember those individuals who actively seek your peace through their commitment and work. Strengthen and uphold them in the tasks that seem unending. We ask that through your gift of love, we may be strengthened to act out our concern for peace in our world.

We remember those in our own families, communities and country who suffer from violence and injustice and those who seek to help them. Help us to be more active in our concern, more giving of ourselves, that we maybe a strength to your people, a visible and active sign of your reign of peace.

We remember those whose lives hold little hope for peace with any kind of security - refugees, those on marginal incomes, those who are confronted with prejudice. We remember those whose peace has been shattered by illness and grief. We remember Heather and Catherine and Greg and their family as they grieve the death of Ray. May they know your love, your peace and the comfort of the loving support of family and friends. ... Now in silence, we remember others close and dear to us - they include from our MacNeill family Martina, Charles and Cheryl, Al, who is celebrating his 75th birthday today... and from our neighbourhood - Nancy and her family and from our

extended church family - Bev, the mother-in-law of Sara Douglas ... God, hear our prayers and in your mercy answer.

And ever present God, on this Remembrance Sunday we remember ourselves - sometimes confident, sometimes frightened, sometimes ready to take a stand for justice, sometimes looking for the quickest way out; sometimes conscious of inner peace, sometimes intensely lonely, unable to feel the reality of you in us, in our world. Gracious God, help us to remember your constant love. Make us channels of your peace, bearers of healing, women and men who hear and respond to pleas for justice in our world.

This we ask in Jesus' name. He taught his disciples how to pray, saying: Our Father who art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. Thy Kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth as it is in Heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For thine is the Kingdom and the power and the glory forever and ever. Amen