

Fifth Sunday of Easter – 2018

God is love. The shortest most concise creed in the Christian tradition. Today we are told that love is the very nature of God and we are invited to abide in that love, to be grafted onto it. That will be the mark of us as a Christian community. Love *should be* the irrefutable, instantly verifiable sign of a Christian. I read this during the week: *How unchristian and ridiculous it is to argue about Christian faith, when we don't even love one another, and by that criteria are not even a Christian?* That is rather harsh, but clearly we are divided and yes it is a scandal, and yes it does diminish our ability to speak to a divided world.

This theme of our division was picked up early in the Great War by the Church of England. In October 1916 a *Mission of Repentance and Hope* was launched by the Archbishop of Canterbury, Randall Davidson and the Archbishop of York, Cosmo Lang. Its rationale came in this statement from the Archbishops: *'We are to repent not because we believe we are guilty of provoking this war but because we, together with other nations that profess to be Christian, have failed to learn how to live together as a Christian family, how to set forth Christ to the peoples who do not know Him. Because it is clear that the Spirit of love does not rule our relations with one another at home, any more than it rules the relations between nations'. 'We look forward to a new England and a new world'. As well as repentance 'the Mission projected a much needed message of hope during the grave time of war'. The nation was invited 'to reflect their attitudes, weaknesses and passions and repent in hope of a better world'.*

In this week's pew sheet I make the comment that we can, quite rightly, have mixed feelings as we commemorate ANZAC Day; I say this with care and recognising the importance of the day for many. There are a number of reasons for this: the first is because it is, after all, not a day in which we celebrate a military victory or a truce or armistice, but a day when we recall the beginning of a poorly conceived military operation that resulted in great loss of life. But also and importantly because our Australian culture, like many others in the western world and beyond, have this dilemma between confronting the truth about the violence and seeming futility of war on one hand, and enjoying the camaraderie it generated, on the other, a camaraderie that has found its way into our vernacular and our self-understanding. This dilemma can only I believe be held in creative tension if we retain the Christian narrative of repentance and hope at the heart of our remembrance.

Whilst many would claim that Australia is a secular nation it is on days like ANZAC Day, that a little recognised, but nonetheless Christian element in our national psyche becomes apparent. The terms 'blood' and 'sacrifice' are evoked at every Christian Eucharist and are spoken of in our observances of ANZAC Day and Remembrance Day. Those sacred words of institution spoken at every Christian Eucharist the words of Jesus 'do this in remembrance of

me' are echoed in what has become a pseudo-sacred refrain: 'Lest we forget.' These words 'do this in remembrance of me' are bookended in the gospels by two important phrases, they were spoken 'on the night he was betrayed' an extraordinary night, leading to a chain of events which found their climax in the words 'peace be with you' spoken by the risen Jesus in the upper room.

It is probably a while since you bumped into a eunuch who happened to be the Treasurer of Ethiopia in O'Connor. But let's pretend that while having a coffee at '39 Steps' you meet some exotic character who has picked up a newspaper and is trying to fathom ANZAC Day. He will read stories of horror from conflicts far afield, retold and reinterpreted and then he will see pictures of communities coming together speaking not just of liberties won, freedoms secured, but of nationhood and culture the ideals of Mateship and good Aussie egalitarianism. How do explain these to our visitor?

Philip (not 'our' Philip) has such an encounter in today's reading from the Book of Acts. He meets a stranger from Ethiopia reading a passage from Isaiah and asks, what is it all about? Philip of course sets the reading from Isaiah into the context of the cross and resurrection – the Good News. The sheep that is led to sacrifice is the Christ of God, the God who is love and his death represents the end of sacrifice, it is as our Prayer Book tells us 'the one true sacrifice;' sacrifice ends because in the resurrection love triumphs and the unity with God which all those former sacrifices tried to achieve has finally been won; peace be with you. In the Christian tradition we have taken the old religions with their temples and sacrifices and turned them into worship; our sacrifices are those of thanksgiving, we do this in prayer and praise, at the heart of which is repentance and hope, in this sacrifice we are at one with Jesus' sacrifice which he calls upon us to remember.

Can we, should we engage in ANZAC Day? The answer is yes. But, our remembrance recalling as we do the events of the Great War and reciting those words 'Lest we forget' is deficient if it is not coupled with a sense of repentance *and* a sense of hope. In the same way that in our gathering this morning and indeed every time we gather for the Eucharist we have the opportunity to hear again those words of Jesus at the heart of the Eucharist: 'do this in remembrance of me.' In this remembering we are at once involved in an act of repentance and hope.

As we recall the tragedy of the wars that have so marred our world let us commit ourselves once again to a spirit of repentance and hope as we live out our Eucharistic spirituality. To truly say 'Lest we forget' we should recall those words of Christ 'do this in remembrance of me.' We remember that betrayal stands behind these remembrances, betrayals which call for repentance. The betrayal of those first disciples, the betrayal of the divided Church and the betrayals which result in war. But in true prophetic spirit let us also remember that those who indeed betrayed Jesus were offered his peace when they gathered in the upper room, a peace that is ours God's

church when we gather and remember, and a peace which is offered to all those who suffered and died in warfare. In this is hope and in this Easter season particularly, we recall that present, although sometimes latent, in any sacrifice offered for love is the great hope of the resurrection because God is love. Lest we forget. Amen.