

2018

Message for Remembrance Day at the Legion Hall in Annapolis Royal

Scripture:

Ephesians 6:10-20

Psalm 90

Mark 13: 1-8

Friends, fellow citizens and residents of the Annapolis Basin, elected officials, and representatives of the armed forces, families of veterans,

Every year, at this part in the ceremony, the preacher is faced with the difficult task to interpret the old texts of the Christian faith anew in the light of memory and history, grief, and current events.

This Remembrance Day is a special one, as exactly 100 years ago, at 11am in the morning an armistice was signed between the victorious Allies and Germany, at Compiègne in France. To mark the centennial of the end of the first world war, church bells will be ringing across the world this afternoon at sunset.

They say that May and June 1914 was beautiful in Europe. In the mansions of the mighty, in expectation of a relaxing summer, servants covered the furniture and packed heaps of luggage for a season at country retreats. Ordinary folks looked forward to holidays at the seaside, hiking in the mountains, and long afternoons at beer gardens or bistros.

What they were talking about that fateful summer in the beer gardens of Berlin and the bistros of Paris, in the music halls of Vienna and the clubs of London? When the talk turned from the weather to politics there would have been those who felt that Germany's building of a huge naval fleet looked like a threat, the Austrians might have discussed the nationalist tensions in the Balkans and the difficulty to keep the empire together, Germans after a few beers could have shouted, "they're encircling us, the Russian the Frenchman, we should get

ahead of them, strike them first, when they don't suspect it yet!"

The politicians knew. On June 16, 1914, the German Chancellor wrote to the German ambassador to Britain, warning "any insignificant conflict of interests between Russia and Austria-Hungary may set the torch of war alight." Within a matter of weeks his prediction came true.

When the Kaiser declared war on Serbia, the social democrat party in Germany organized a peace rally. 3/4 million Germans came out to protest the emperor's decision to declare war. But their demonstrations and warnings were too late. The war machinery had already been started.

As Jesus was leaving the temple, one of his disciples said to him, "Look, Teacher! What massive stones! What magnificent buildings!".. "Do you see all these great buildings?" replied Jesus. "Not one stone here will be left on another; every one will be thrown down." (Mark 13:1-2)

August 1914, Eye witnesses say :When the soldiers boarded the trains to the front, brass bands played music, every German soldier had flowers on his helmet and in his buttonholes, everyone waved and wished them all the best: "get the job done, and see you soon", and all the soldiers were happy. The same in France and Britain, and even many of the young Canadians were excited to go and were cheered on by their communities.

Those who suspected, whose hearts were broken in the fear of what might be coming did not cheer at the train stations. The trains were off, and then came the apocalypse.

Yes, you've heard me right, using that word apocalypse. Today we hear the word apocalypse and we connect it with an idea of the end of the world is coming. But its a

word from the bible, the New Testament, and biblically an apocalypse is a revealing, a pulling of the veil.

World war 1 tore a veil off the concept of "war":

WW1 revealed with utter brutality what war's reality is. Not "hitting the Frenchman over the head and going home" as the Germans would have liked it, nor "boys being heroes and freedom fighters" as the Brits saw it. WW1 pulled the veil:

The bells at 5pm toll for the 40 million dead and wounded and starved of this war, 9.7 million killed soldiers in only 4 years, 10 million civilians killed in 4 years, 8 million mules, horses and donkeys ripped to pieces alongside their human comrades in only 4 years, 1 out of ten Canadian boys and men who never came home. Entire villages and towns stripped of a generation of young men. And all for what? And why all this? Historians still analyze how the world set its direction so wrong for the 20th century. Some have contended that Europe "sleepwalked into war". Others have demonstrated that preparations for this war had been made at the highest level for years.

At the beginning of the 21st century we also do live in a time of apocalypse now- Its not the end of the world, its the beginning of another revealing:

Mass Extinction and Global warming, abject poverty and blasphemous wealth side by side all reveal to us the true nature of our consumer mentality and capitalist society.

We live in a time where God reveals our spiritual poverty, and the self destructive powers which we are not reigning in with

enough determination.

Here is our gospel's passage from what biblical scholars call the "little apocalypse":

"When you hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be alarmed.???) Such things must happen,(???)_ but the end is still to come. Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be earthquakes in various places, and famines. These are the beginning of birth pains."

Such things like wars and famines, "must happen?" -O Jesus , that is difficult. The little Apocalypse. The little revealing.

Wars and rumours of wars must happen as long as our world's leaders are concerned with power more than with care.

The Biblical scholar Walter Wink explains that the bible assumes that all institutions have a corporate soul or spirit. Our military, schools, churches, courts, governments. They are meant to fulfil a purpose. They are given by God to enable humanity to live with, peace, safety, fairness, love and wisdom. When the "powers" of these institutions are aligned with their original purpose, their 'soul or spirit' is peace and respect. But they are easily corrupted by evil, such as lust for power for the sake of power.

Then a biblical voice rises loud through her prophets who "reveal" corruption of the institutions. How do you treat the poor? Those who are different? The migrant? The women and children?

Wars and famines and all kinds of upheavals, in the biblical sense "must happen", not because God wants them to

happen (!) , they must happen when our institutions become obsessed with power and forget their duty to serve the common good.

Ephesians says our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the powers, and principalities... institutions and their leaders who have lost their way and become corrupt,

our struggle is against the love of selfish abuse of power ,

our struggle is against that in us and others which love to manipulate or to be manipulated,

Our struggle is against the powers that make us want to believe that my nation is better than yours and my skin colour has more value than another s.

Today we see a resurgence of the same powers that led to WW1. Nationalism, racism, imperialism...isms of all kinds and the love of authority and weapons. The powers that brought us World War 1 and 2 are the same powers that raise their ugly head now. (even as Trump is standing on French soil, pretending that the United States of America are not disintegrating.)

And we are worried. Both the acute environmental crisis and the mounting threat to democratic processes, reveals

to us that we can not take peace for granted. That we can not take democracy for granted, that war may be declared

again by someone if the mood is right and preparations have been made. Political stupidity, nationalism, authoritarianism, denial. What do we do?

We have to go into battle, my friends.

In a way we are already at war.

This time demands bravery of each of us.

Just as in war time it is not a good thing to pretend that nothing is happening. Just as in war time it is not a good idea to hide the task is to face reality with courage.

But this is not a war that can ever be won with weapons.

This is a war over hearts and minds of our neighbours and our political leaders and decision makers.

This is a war that will only ever be won with words and good deeds .

We need to reveal deception where it happens. We need to speak up.

We carry the torch of truth telling and the flame of love of neighbour no matter what her ethnicity or creed or sexual orientation.

“Put on the full armour of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil’s schemes. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one.”

In a short moment, we will hear the famous poem : In Flander's fields". Quote:

"Take up our quarrel with the foe:

*To you from failing hands we throw
The torch; be yours to hold it high."*

Let me humbly propose that there is only one way today to keep faith with those who died:

We must recognize that the foe is not some enemy "out there" in another place or country, but the enemy is within each and everyone of us.

We need to hold our leaders to account, we need to tell our truth in schools and in the media, and we need to demonstrate if need be, before its too late.

War must be no more. We are here to keep and develop a real peace or we will be no more.

If ye break faith with us who die
We shall not sleep, though poppies grow
In Flanders fields.

Elisabeth Bachem-Jennings,

St. George & St. Andrew United Church