

# Pilgrim UCA, 11.11.2018

John 14:27, Matthew 5:1-12

**“Not as the world gives, do I give you peace.”**



I've had those words rattling around in my head for several weeks, as I thought about worship today: *“not as the world gives, do I give you peace”*.

They've shaped my thoughts around today, just as they did for the worship I led at the Presbytery meeting yesterday.

There they sat alongside another passage from John's Gospel: one where Jesus is on trial for his life before Pontius Pilate.

You might remember the interrogation there, and Jesus' response to Pilate's question about whether he (Jesus) is a king of the Jews. Jesus replies: *“My kingdom is not from this world. If my kingdom were from this world, my followers would be fighting to keep me from being handed over to the Jews. But as it is, my kingdom is not from here.”*

*“Not as the world gives, do I give you peace”*.

I grew up hearing that Jesus was telling Pilate that his 'kingdom' was in another place, removed from this world. That may be true, but I think he was also saying that his kingdom was different in nature too, in style, in its being. I believe he was saying that Pilate wouldn't understand, because the only peace he understood was the “Pax Romana” - the Roman peace. Pax Romana was best expressed as: *“You do things our way, and there'll be peace. Otherwise we'll come down on you like a ton of bricks!”*

*“Not as the world gives, do I give you peace”*.

These words sit with me as I think about my response to days like today, Remembrance Day. Once upon a time, they inspired me to think that I wanted nothing to do with days like ANZAC and Remembrance Day. I found it really easy to hold myself distant from what I saw as the militarism of these days. Then I entered a small country community as its minister, and I began to discover my own arrogance.

In learning to love the people of Burra, I learned to love their stories too, and to see in those good people gathering for the Remembrance day services, a different sense of peace.

I learned to suspend judgement, and to listen for what they were remembering. I'll always be glad I had the wisdom and patience to grow through that listening.

I still sit somewhat uncomfortably with days like today, and particularly with ANZAC Day, which I believe has become something far from what it was created to be.

I sit uncomfortably with my role as a Christian minister in the midst of it all, particularly when I see the way of Christ appropriated by the way of 'Empire': the “GOD is on our side” idea.

I sit uncomfortably because I'm challenged by the words of Jesus:

*“Not as the world gives, do I give you peace”*.

If I believe, as I do, that my calling is to be a peacemaker in the name and way of Jesus, then the nature of that peace seems to be different from the way in which we understand the word.

It needs to be more than simply the absence of actual fighting. It's different from the threats of *“my army is bigger than your army”*, and the other rhetoric we're hearing around the world at the moment.

It seems to me that we're hearing more sabre-rattling and global trash talk at present, than I can remember for a very long time – not only political, but religious as well, as much by people identifying as Christian as anyone else. And I struggle to reconcile that with the way of Jesus.

To his disciples, and to Pilate, Jesus said something like this: *My peace isn't like a Pax Romana. It's not simply the absence of fighting. My peace is like "shalom".* [The word translates in English as "peace", but that's not an adequate translation. In Hebrew, it means being in a state of wholeness, harmony, completeness, prosperity, welfare and tranquillity.]

And for me, that doesn't sit terribly well alongside the kind of peace 'the world' gives. And yet it has to. I have to be willing to wrestle with these things in my head and my heart. Because if I know ANYTHING about Jesus, it's that he lived in the real world, and HE wrestled with it too. His world was dominated by empire, as ours is today.

He challenged it by speaking truth to power, but he never tried to pretend it wasn't there.

He challenged 'the way things are' by refusing to accept that that's how they had to stay, but also by acting with grace towards people on the outer.

He challenged it by inviting people to imagine another way of seeing... of naming...

He challenged it by blessing the people that that others called 'cursed'.

And he did all of this in the name of GOD, because he refused to believe that GOD wasn't in the midst of it all! Calling to people to hope instead of despair, to love instead of fear, to a common humanity, out of tribalism and hatred.

It can be hard to be practise 'shalom/peace', can't it? ... to dream it, to imagine it, to live it, rather than being overwhelmed by all that works against it.

Well it was hard for Jesus too. It got him killed! And yet, enough people believed in the truth of his teaching and example, to remember it and preserve it as a gift for all time.

What we call 'The Beatitudes', we could also call Jesus' picture of vision for peace

I struggle with what ANZAC Day has become in recent years. I'm not sure it honours the people it claims to do. But for me, Remembrance Day is somehow different. In a deliberate attempt to celebrate the day the guns fell silent, it makes a very different statement. It speaks of peace!

I sincerely believe that it offers an invitation to reflect and remember - with honesty and dignity - the hopes that it carried in 1918, and can still carry today. It speaks of peace.

It speaks the truth of the good people, who have come home from the calamity of so many wars, and somehow put their lives back together.

If we listen, it might also help us to hear the truth of the ex-service women and men, who take their own lives at a rate 5 times that of the general population.

If we listen honestly, we also recognise the stories of the Indigenous people who have served Australia in war, whose stories have rarely been told: including the 50 who were left in South Africa at the end of the Boer War, denied re-entry in Australia under the White Australia Policy.

At the same time, it speaks the truth of the young serviceman I know a little, whose unit has spent the last month in Indonesia, offering humanitarian aid after the earthquakes.

I have hope for Remembrance Day... because it calls us to listen... to remember, to re-member our shared story as Australians... and because it calls us to peace.

And I believe that the Spirit of GOD is in that – despite everything!

*"Not as the world gives, do I give you peace".* Thanks be to GOD! AMEN

