

Sermon for Hiroshima Day
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Wellington Cathedral of St. Paul, Choral Evensong, August 1st 2010

Readings: Isaiah 2. 1 -5. Romans 12. 9 -21.

This week we remember Hiroshima. On Monday 6th August 1945 at 8.15 on a sunny morning the crew of Enola Gay dropped Little Boy on Hiroshima. 70,000 people died, many more later. The death toll was a complete cross section of that society in that town at that moment; men women and children, babies at the breast, babies yet to be born, lawyers, clergy, civil servants, housemaids, pets and plants, all gone in a flash. The only human group under-represented was the military. The only group over-represented was Christians. Hiroshima was one of the Christian centres in Japan.

But Hiroshima was only the logical conclusion of what had gone before. Tactics that had been used by both sides at, for example, Coventry and Dresden. A conscious, deliberate tactic of 20th century war. What proved different with the atomic bomb was the legacy of radioactivity.

Last month Britain showcased the unmanned bomber plane Taranis, named after the Celtic god of thunder. It has cost \$320 million so far. The American equivalent is called The Reaper. Robot tanks have been active on the Pakistani border for six years. The grim reaper two. To reap, a serviceman or woman in Nevada, 12,000 K away gazes into a screen, flies the plane, and decides who is a terrorist and who is an innocent villager. It's a 9 -5 type of job. "Good day at the office dear?" "Well a bit dull really, no hits. Let's go out to dinner and a movie." Mistaken identity is bound to happen in that distant land. The robot itself cannot discriminate, it has no mercy. Up to last year 14 al-Queda leaders and more than 600 civilians had been killed, making 97% of deaths collateral damage. Robot weapons are a fast growing and lucrative industry.

This all seems a far cry from our two readings tonight. Isaiah with his vision of a future where people live as their creator wants them to live. People at peace with each other with no preparations for war, the destructive sword recycled into a productive plough. St. Paul writing to the churches in Nero's Rome is not only telling diverse congregations how to find unity amongst themselves, but in our passage in particular, he is guiding them into how to relate to people outside the church. They are not to shut themselves away but to be part of the wider society. Where this causes misunderstandings and persecution they are to respond with a blessing not a curse. They are not to be overcome by evil but to overcome evil with good. Of course not every persecutor is going to accept that goodness, so Paul says 'as far as possible be at peace with everyone'. Paul is basing his words on Jesus.

Jesus lived in a violent society and many of His contemporaries wanted Him to be a violent military Messiah. He refused. Isaiah had given a vision of peace but it was Jesus who said, let's do it, this is how peace can be found, how the vision could come true. So he really said 'You heard that it was said, an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth, but I say don't use violence to resist evil' Mat. 5 38,39 (N. T. Wright trans) And again He said 'Love your neighbour as yourself' and in His parable of the Samaritan two enemies become neighbours, brought together by the compassion of one and the need of the other. Later His ride on a donkey into Jerusalem proclaimed that He was the King of peace.

The 6th commandment 'Do not murder' is surely changed to do not kill as it is moved to the positive statement 'Love your enemies'.

Of course some people persist in being our enemies but the point that Jesus and St. Paul make is that we don't respond in the same way as our persecutors are behaving. We don't enucleate an eye for an eye, but we respond in a different, more creative and loving way, even if it means personal suffering. We are to bless not curse, and overcome evil with goodness.

This happened with the passive resistance of the people of Parihaka. They ploughed the disputed land and as each ploughman was arrested, another took his place. 1879 was known as the year of the plough, Isaiah would have been pleased. When exasperated settlers finally marched into and destroyed part of the village they were first greeted by women and children with food. I think we should make more of Parihaka and proportionately less of Gallipoli. Surely Parihaka shows a better model for nation- building, a better way to respond to a violent threat? Both Parihaka and Gallipoli were heroic defeats; but the non-violent methods of Parihaka have had wonderful success in the last 50 years, the fall of the Berlin wall without bloodshed being but one example of many. We need to be told more about non violent ways of achieving political change.

Whatever we may think of the practicality of the sentiments and methods of Jesus the early church followed them for 300 years. Their 'respect for life' meant not killing other people and they met the purges of their enemies with what we would call non-violent resistance, even if it meant martyrdom. Even in that situation enemies were to be loved and blessed, they were not to be killed, good was to overcome evil. So Christians did not deliberately kill. A soldier converted to Christ was expected to leave the fighting force. I suppose our unarmed Army Chaplains are a 'Last Post' played for that tradition.

To quote a third century document about entrants for baptism, certain people were excluded, these included 'brothel keepers, gladiators, idol worshippers, soldiers, and magistrates who used the power of the sword' (quoted by Hornus). Nowadays I'm sure we would expect an adult baptismal candidate to have given up brothel keeping and idol worship and we might even add tobacco manufacturer and drug dealer, but we have no qualms about someone in the armed forces. That contraindication has been deleted.

It all changed in the fourth century when the empire became officially Christian including the Roman Army. Many people must have been 'nominal' and the state needed an ethical base for its 'Christian' army. Saints Augustine and Ambrose and others provided the criteria for this. Wars were not to be unrestricted mayhem, and that was good, certain conditions were to apply, but it was nevertheless a licence to kill and the Church has been in Bondage to it ever since. It was a significant departure from the way of Jesus, Paul and the early Church. The 'Justified War' theory is still alive and well. Last month the Investing Advisory Body of the Church of England brought out its new investment policy: no more investment in firms manufacturing indiscriminate weapons, they said, landmines, cluster munitions (thankfully internationally forbidden from today) and nuclear weapons, these are forbidden - but it is legitimate for the Church to have stocks and shares in companies making weapons compatible with the 'just war' theory. Regrettably no ploughshares on offer.

No further investments in landmines, good, but modern warfare does not fulfil just war criteria anyway. 90 years ago 90% of casualties were fighting men, and only 10% of casualties were civilians who unhappily got in the way. In the wars of the last 80 years that figure has been

reversed and now 90% of war casualties are civilian, as at Hiroshima, on the Pakistani border and in Iraq. There must be protection of civilians and discrimination between combatants and civilians. Civilians are never to be the targets of warfare. The weapons used in war must discriminate between combatants and innocents. These are essential elements in the Justified war criteria. Without civilian protection a war is not a just one. The licence to kill has been made invalid and redundant by the facts of modern war. The just war does not pass its test. That wonderful hymn tune by Sullivan, St Gertrude, desperately needs new words. Christian soldiers have to either make major changes to modern warfare or opt out completely as they did in the early church.

In the Anglican Pacifist Fellowship we continue the pacifist strand that has remained in the church since the fourth century, so we say No to war, not that New Zealand is properly at war at present, more a sort of trade aid for us. So we say No to war and No to all preparation for war and, the latter amounts to \$8.4 million a day in this year's budget. We also have our 'Yes's. We seek reconciliation and justice and an ordered non-violent society. The Peace and Conflict Studies Centre at Otago University is now taking its first post graduate students. This is the brain child of one of our members and three of our members are trustees. But back to the 'No's for a moment, we would certainly wish for that daily \$8.4 million to be used in a different way. I take pride in much that our forces are doing. For example, they are taking aid and saving many lives with those ancient Hercules aircraft which are now being refitted; they deserve to be renamed Samaritans. And our soldiers are increasing their training in peacemaking and civil defence, but I think they would be more effective with local populations if they were not lethally armed. Also I think people would bless us more if our armed forces were forged into a rapid response civil defence force, something the world increasingly needs. It would overcome evil happenings with good deeds, it would be loving our neighbours, it would be tanks into tractors, swords into ploughshares.