

Peace Sunday: Nagasaki Day, August 9th 2009 Holy Trinity Cathedral Auckland.

Sermon: Rev. Dr. V. Jonathan Hartfield.

Readings for Day: 2 Samuel 18:5-9, 15 & 31-33; Ephesians 4:25 - 5:2; John 6:35, 41-51.

At 11.02 a.m. on Thursday 9th August 1945 'Bock's Car' crew dropped 'Fat Boy' over Nagasaki.

74,000 people died.

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, and those yet to be born.

Teachers and students, moths and dogs, birds and plants, all gone. As with Hiroshima three days earlier the only human group under-represented was the military. The two bombs were only the logical conclusion of what had gone before. The progression of a deliberate and conscious tactic of 20th century war. What proved different in Japan was the long legacy of radioactivity.

My own adult experience of war was as a mission doctor in the three -year Biafra/Nigeria war of 1967 (6.7.67-15.1.70). There was a blockade of Biafra and the only way food aid could get in was by night flights that landed on a small strip of hill- top main road. Wrecked planes on either side commemorated the bravery of pilots and aid workers. But despite their efforts over a million people starved to death, mostly children and old people. There were 100,000 military casualties. Later I was to find that the British Government had supported the policy of starvation.

Last month it was reported that American robot tanks in Pakistan had killed 14 al-Qaeda terrorists and over 600 villagers since 2006. The robots still have a human controller but he is 1,000 miles away..

Of course some civilians have always been unlucky enough to be in the way, and a certain amount of pillage and rape has always been par for the course when one army meets another. And people easily get out of control in war as in the brutal death of Absalom. This reading also reminds us of the terrible grief a war brings, no less for a villager than for King David.

But it is the disproportion between civilian and military casualties in modern war that I wish to bring to your attention. 100years ago 90% of casualties were in the armed forces, only 10% was collateral damage; but now that number is reversed. 90% of deaths in our modern wars are civilian deaths. This is of concern to many people of course, but it has especial consequences for the Christian who fights in war - albeit reluctantly - for Christians are only allowed to fight if civilians are protected and the number killed and wounded are small.

It was in a way much simpler for the early Church.

Jesus was what we would call a pacifist and His methods were those of non – violent resistance. This upset many of His contemporaries who wanted violent action. Paul followed Jesus and his words in our second lesson ‘be imitators of God as beloved children, and walk in love as Christ loved us’ Ep.5:1 shows here as in many other places his acceptance of Jesus’ teaching summed up in Matthew 5 ‘Do not violently resist evil’, ‘Love your enemies’.

Whatever we may think of the practicality of this pacifist way of life the early Church interpreted it literally for 300 years. Loving both neighbour and enemy meant respect for life and that meant not killing other people; so they met the purges of their enemies with what we would call non-violent resistance, even if it meant martyrdom.

Army converts were expected to leave the fighting force and I suppose our unarmed Military Chaplains are a last vestige of that tradition.

To quote a third century document about candidates for Baptism. Certain people were excluded and these exclusions included brothel keepers, gladiators, idol worshippers, soldiers and magistrates who used the power of the sword. (Hornus.p.163) Nowadays I’m sure we would still expect our candidates for Baptism to have given up brothel keeping and idol worship, and we might even add tobacco manufacturers and drug dealers, but soldiers were deleted from the list 16 centuries ago. Not without debate of course and the issue of loving and killing one’s enemy has remained debatable with a minority unwilling to kill other people in war.. We in the Anglican Pacifist Fellowship form a continuous line from the traditional pacifist stance, although we are now minority dissenters from the ‘just war’ majority view fashioned in the fourth century. We have kept to the simple respect for life by saying No to war. But we do realize and debate with ourselves and others the complexities of no killing. The ethics that pull in different directions. To love our neighbour as ourself has a certain simplicity until we have to love our enemy as well. Loving our enemy could then mean that we do not appear to be loving our neighbour enough by failing to adequately protect her when the enemy attacks.

We recognize the difficulties.

But we do believe Jesus’ life and statements back our stance of respect for human life. No Killing. Here are some of His statements.

I am the Bread of life.

I am the vine.

I am the living water ... Not the dead sea.

I am the good shepherd...Not a hunter or warrior.

I am the light of the world and you are the salt that preserves the world.

Jesus the Bridegroom, not the undertaker.

Jesus, Lamb of God. Not lion of God.

Not a destructive image among them. So the APF says no to taking the lives of human beings and no to war and its very costly preparation that could be better spent elsewhere.

We would also like to see more prominence given to successful conflict resolution by non-violent means. Ex President Clinton seems to have negotiated well in North Korea but Jesus' methodology was used by Martin Luther King jr. In USA, Archbishop Tutu in South Africa, Corazon Aquino in the Philippines, who died last week, and the amazing and unexpected collapse of the Berlin Wall. All places and causes where a blood bath was expected. All achieved by the methods and inspiration of Jesus. Locally, why have we been so shy about Parihaka? Let us be more positive about the successes of non-violent methods. The APF does not believe in the just war although there have been 16 centuries of war justified by its conditions. We do not think they are enough to justify the killing, destruction and heartbreak that accompanies every war.

However, modern war has forcibly disarmed 'just war' Christians. In no way does the modern 'necessary' war fit the criteria for a Christian soldier; So may I commend, as an alternative, a move from the military to the police. Not the American militarised police now common in our TV shows but our NZ/ British tradition of community constables as remembered by some of us and seen in Miss Marple and classic British film. They try and prevent crime, they persuade, when force is necessary it is non-lethal, last resort and under law. I wish our excellent army peacekeepers could go that step further and leave their rifles behind. Policing is a model worth thinking about for us all. International links are quite different from 50 years ago so policing beyond national borders is feasible and happens.

Lastly we of the APF pledge ourselves to work for the construction and promotion of a Christian society of peace and justice, and that starts with each individual Christian.

Throughout our everyday lives we must grow into the kind of people who put Jesus' love of neighbour and enemy into action. We are to be people who behave and think as peacemakers, however trivial those thoughts and actions may seem. It is only when violence in all aspects of our lives becomes incomprehensible to us that love and peacemaking show themselves, and become, the natural response to evil. Then a culture of peace and justice will grow around us, as the Fruits of the Spirit grow within us.

Paul wrote, 'Be imitators of God, living a life of love as Christ loved us'. So as we imitate Jesus, Nagasaki and Biafra and the robot tanks prowling in the Pakistani hills will more and more become to us the incomprehensible evil that they must surely be to God.

Ref. It is not lawful for me to fight. J-M Hornus. 1980

This sermon is available on the Anglican Pacifist Fellowship's resources page at <http://www.converge.org.nz/pma/apf/resource.htm>