

Address for Anzac Day 25 April, 2020
The Cathedral Church of Christ, Grafton
Dr Murray Harvey, Bishop of Grafton

We went over and took the ridge and we stayed there for a few days and made the trench as comfortable as possible, but down on the flat it was a horrible place. The worst night I've spent was there with great shells falling all night...My mate was killed up there that night...They hadn't buried the dead. They were still on the wire out in front, and the rats were as big as my boot. They were shocking damn things. I got trench fever and they had to carry me out. I think that was one of the worst experiences I had, I was being carried on top of the trench and the boys carrying me were underneath with machine gun bullets flying around at the time. That was bad ... very bad.¹

Australian Soldier Ted Harper, reflected on his experiences at Passchendaele on the Western Front in 1917. This is just a snippet of what he endured during the Great War. Today we remember and honour the sacrifices he and others made on our behalf during that war and other conflicts since then.

Today we look at Anzac Day from a new perspective. Many are suffering today because of the COVID19 Pandemic. Suffering in different ways, some from anxiety and worry due to social isolation or about catching the disease, many have suffered with the infection itself and many have died. Then there's the economic impact, which will be with us for a long time to come. While these concerns are very real, our commemoration today of what the Anzac men and women endured is sobering and puts things into some kind of perspective.

The scale of human suffering in WW1 alone was immense. Anyone who has ever visited a Commonwealth War Grave will know how overwhelming it is to look at a vast expanse of graves, or a huge War Memorial like the one at Ypres, which lists thousands of names of men and women who don't even have a grave. Each one represents the loss of a precious human life, created and loved by God.



On visiting the grave of my Great Uncle (George Hooper) at Cite Bon Jean Cemetery in France, I was overwhelmed by the enormity of this grief, and surprised by my own grief. After all, I never knew him. And his sister (my Grandmother) didn't speak about him very much. Yet the suffering was so great and affected so many families, that its ripples continue to flow. Behind each grave, each memorial inscription, lies the story of broken dreams and of wider family grief. A letter in our family archives, from my Great Grandfather to the CO, reads simply: "The Late Pte GWB Hooper was my son. His mother is still alive. Please send some photographs of his grave".

Damian Morgan, a student from the Anglican Church Grammar School in Brisbane has written a poem for Anzac Day entitled 'Sir', part of which I'd like to share. In the Poem, a school boy speaks to an elderly returned soldier on Anzac Day:

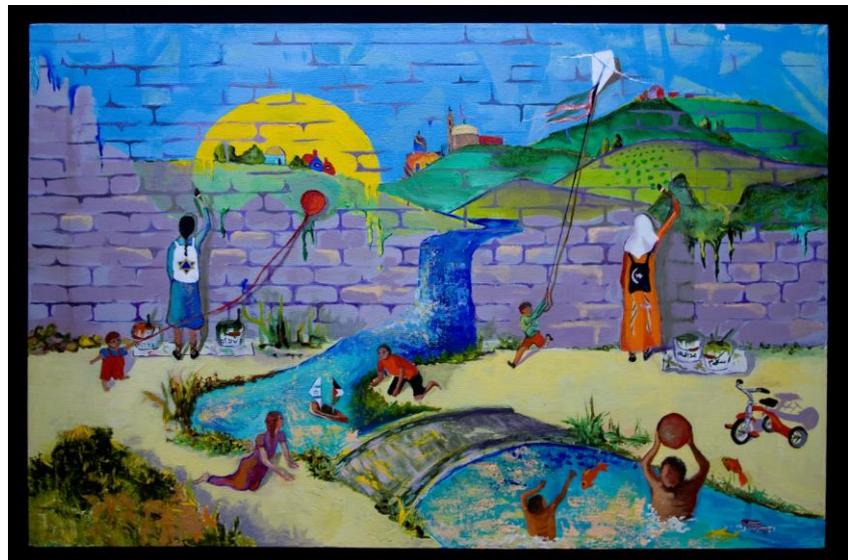
*I watch the flag dancing half way down the pole
That damn bugle player sends chills to my soul
I feel the pride and the sorrow – there's nothing the same
As standing to attention on Anzac Day.*

*So, Sir – on behalf of the young and the free
Will you take a message when you finally do leave
To your mates that are lying from Tobruk to the Somme
The legend of your bravery will always live on.*

*So, Sir – on behalf of the young and the free
Will you take a message when you finally do leave
It's the least we can do Sir to repay the debt,
We'll always remember you – Lest We Forget.*

So what we do on Anzac Day is to remember. Also we grieve, especially if we're remembering the loss of a loved one in a more recent conflict. Yet simply to remember is not enough. Simply to grieve is not enough. The only effective way of remembering, and of honouring those for whom we grieve, is to live life to the full, while striving **today** for a more just and peaceful world.

Our Old Testament reading this morning is from Isaiah (2:1-5). This is beautiful imagery of a time of peace and harmony. Yet it seems as far away from us now as it did back in 1914 or 1939. This brief Oracle in Isaiah 2:2-4 about future peace, the destruction of weapons and about God's protection highlighted for Isaiah's audience the difference between the reality of their present situation of suffering and the hoped-for future of peace.



Painting our Future²

The message of the prophet was that until people began to follow in God's way, this future peace might never become a reality. For those of us with faith in Jesus Christ, the impasse between how things are now, and how things could be, is overcome by Jesus' way of love. As we're reminded by the reading from John (15:9-17) Jesus has come speaking and living God's way of love. Simply to remember and to grieve is never enough. We honour the memories and the grief if we step forward in hope and love.

At Anzac Day and Remembrance Day services, the Kohima Epitaph is sometimes used. It goes like this:

“When you go home, tell them of us and say, for your tomorrow, we gave out today”.

Despite the sufferings and challenges that are so real in our lives at the moment, this is the tomorrow for which they gave up their lives. This is our today. Let’s face it with love, courage, determination and hope.

Creator God, who brings one day to a close and a new day to dawn,
we remember those who, in time of war and conflict,
gave their ‘today’ that we might have a ‘tomorrow’.
We honour you Lord for the wondrous gift of life
and for our freedom that was won at such a cost.
Make us a people zealous for peace and
hasten the day when there will be no more wars,
only peace everlasting. Amen.

+Murray Harvey

¹ *Crosses: Australian Soldiers in the Great 1914-1918*. Tony Matthews, Boolarong (1987), pp. 77-78.

² The painting entitled *Painting our Future* depicts two women, representing their respective communities, “painting” a future of peace and justice for all children and all people. They are creating this vision for a future where there are no more walls that divide, both figuratively and in reality. A collaborative effort by six artists as part of the Seeing Through Walls Project. Source: odysseus.nervegarden.com/2013/03/20/seeing-through-walls/