

Address for Anzac Day 25 April, 2021

St Andrew's, Lismore

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Painting our Future²

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".

Today, we recognise that these ripples flow, not just down the generations but they shatter the lives of the injured as well. We lost just over 40 soldiers in the recent conflict in Afghanistan, but we lost ten times that number later, through suicide amongst the veterans of that conflict. We pray that the forthcoming Royal Commission will identify ways that serving defence personnel and veterans can be given the resources and support they need so that the ripples of war don't destroy the lives of the living as well as the dead.

In our readings from the 1st Letter of John (1 Jn 3:16-24) and from John's Gospel (Jn 10:11-18) today refer to the *laying down of lives*. On ANZAC Day of course we think of those whose lives have been lost, or laid down, in time of war, for our freedom. No doubt one reason why these readings have been chosen.

But of course what is being referred to is Jesus Christ laying down his life for us. What the author of 1 John is saying in his letter is that since Christ to whom Christians owe their inspiration died in this way for us, we in our turn ought to lay down our lives for our one another. Yet what is this laying down of life that is being called for? Because the actual laying down of life has been rarely called for (even in the first century most Christians were not called upon to die for their faith).

But love has other outlets and there are many ways that we "lay down our lives" for others from day to day.

Support of veterans is one example. How can we "lay down our lives" – that is, devote our lives, to the welfare of our veterans – to help them not only just survive, but to flourish? No less a quality of love is demanded of the Christian.

This is what we can do for the living and this is what we should have a passion for as Christians today.

But of course we also remember. 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 we serve the living - our veterans, and we remember the fallen, and also we grieve, especially if we're remembering the loss of a loved one in a more recent conflict. Yet simply to serve, remember and grieve is not enough. We also need to strive for a more just and peaceful world.

The Epistle of 1 John that we heard this morning is dominated by two great thoughts: God is light (1:5), and God is love (4:8, 16). God is the source of our light to our minds and the source of warmth to our hearts. As those touched by his light and love we should live up to the highest standard: including laying down our lives (ie serving) one another in love. Yet the peace and harmony that this way of life can bring seems as far away from us now as it did back in 1914 or 1939.

Simply to serve, remember and grieve is never enough. We honour the living, the memories and the grief if we step forward in hope and love to work for peace and a better world.

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 our 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/