Sunday November 9, 2014 Megan Purdy
Isaiah 2:1-4, Psalm 46, I John 2:7-17
Sermon: **Ripping Out the Seeds of Hate**

It is hard to believe, but once again the month of November, and Remembrance Day, are upon us. Remembrance Day has always been a special day for me as a Canadian, and I’m sure it has likewise been for you. As a child growing up, I remember both sets of grandparents, my teachers at school, and an elderly Dutch man in my church speaking often; sometimes in brave tones, sometimes quietly with regret, and often with a strange mix of relief and grief about the horrors of living through war. As I have grown older and gotten to know veterans, both elderly and in my own age group, I have become further convinced that war, while sometimes unavoidable and seemingly necessary, is always an evil and traumatic experience for all those involved and affected by it. War is very costly. So no wonder we remember, and honour those who have fought, and at times died. No wonder we still take a moment and remember those who suffered and fought in the World Wars, in Korea, and Afghanistan, and in other missions in places like; Rwanda, Bosnia, and Somalia. May our remembering also encompass those who have currently gone at our request to places like Iraq and Syria. For these men and women too, and for their families, the cost of war must not be forgotten. We must remember.

The financial costs of war go without saying and the physical costs of war have been in the last century very well documented. Perhaps the first cost that springs to our minds is the cost of war in terms of lives lost. It is good and it is fair for us to think of cost in terms of lives lost. For many, perhaps even for some of you; brothers, cousins, uncles, fathers, husbands, neighbours and friends do not return. But is war costly only for those individuals who die and for their families? Certainly not. For those who have returned the cost is great as well. Recently, thankfully, there has been extensive discussion starting about the mental, emotional, and psychological costs of war for those who have survived. For some there is the cost of a change in quality of life because of serious physical injury. For many the cost involves the complicated mix of both relief and yet guilt at having survived while so many other friends and compatriots did not. There is the very real, and very debilitating costs associated with suffering from post traumatic stress disorders, there is intense anguish over what they have witnessed and seen, and there is the very real cost of moral anguish as many struggle to accept and to live with the fact that they have killed. As Stanley Hauerwas, a modern American theologian reminds us, one of the most affecting and morally and psychologically expensive costs of war is the sacrifice of our unwillingness to kill, which “is the dark side of the willingness in war to ( risk being) killed.” Yes, the physical, psychological, emotional, and moral costs of war are very great. We must remember. But more than that, as those who worship and serve the Prince of Peace, we must also do something.

The presence of war is nothing new. From the time of Cain and Abel, individuals and groups have risen up in violence against others. Any quick survey of human history, and even of our very own Old Testament will confirm this truth. Just as the presence and problem of war is not new, neither is the challenge that it has presented to the church. Since the very birth of Christianity there has been ongoing and nuanced discussion about whether or not Christians should partake in war, how they should respond to war, whether war should be fully condemned in every situation, or whether war could be morally justified and defended by the church. It’s an interesting and complicated discussion that is necessary as the church wrestles with how to work for peace in a violent world.

As those who worship and follow the Prince of Peace, there is an implicit tension as we identify situations in which evil becomes so intense, and the road to peace becomes so blocked that war cannot be avoided. The struggle is further intensified as we read Scriptures such as our passages from Isaiah and the Psalms today, in which it becomes abundantly clear that God’s ultimate will is for the world, and the people and nations within it, to live in peace. When the prophet Isaiah spoke this message of hope he delivered it to a people who were in exile, living under foreign domination as the result of a war of conquest. The message looks forward to the end of the age, when God’s reign is fully realized and experienced. In this future day God declares through Isaiah that people from all nations will come from all directions to the mountain of the Lord. They will stream to the place of God, which they will understand to be the place and source of all wisdom and life. As they come, we are told that the Lord will judge the people, and that he will arbitrate between the nations. Those who come to the mountain of God will come, beating their swords-which are implements of death and destruction, into pruning hooks or plowshares-which are implements that nurture and give abundance. God further promises that the nations will no longer rise up against one another, and that they will no longer study war. But rather it is implied, they will become scholars of peace.

David in Psalm 46:9 further reflects on and communicates the hope and belief that in God’s final reign there will be no room for war. In 46:9 we read that God will break the bow, and shatter the spear. He will burn the shield with fire. He will destroy the weapons of war because there will no longer be any need for them. The promise of peace during the reign of God in Isaiah, and the assertion that God will destroy the weapons of war in the Psalms leaves no room for doubt. In the future, perfect, and holy reign of God there will be no war, only peace. While this is reassuring and can be a great source of hope for us it can also broaden the depth of the tensions we feel as the church lives in a world filled with wars; even at times with wars that are understandable. These are not actions used to describe the attitude of a complacent God towards war. Rather, they attest to a God who, for its very violence and destruction, wants rid of war once and for all. What then can we do to initiate and to grow within our world the presence of the peace that God so earnestly desires for humanity?

The answer I believe comes in boldly living as people of the light, who work to share the light of God with others, and who take notice of what is growing and blossoming in their own lives and in the lives of their neighbours and communities. A number of weeks ago Dana preached on the parable of the sower in which the kingdom and ways of God are compared to seeds that are sown, and our receptivity to those seeds are compared to as various kinds of soil. These images of seeds and soil are helpful in our discussion of war and how we work for peace. Just as seeds of love, justice, mercy, and grace can grow in our lives, so can seeds of division, power hunger, violence and hatred. In every conflict, and in every war, the enemy is the same. The enemy is the planting, nurturing and flourishing of seeds of hatred within the lives of individuals and groups. Whether it be the Nazi rising up and oppressing all those who are not “Arian”, the Hutu rising up against the Tutsi in Rwanda, or war lords in Somalia oppressing their own people, the root cause is the same-hatred, and an absence of care and concern for the wellbeing of other individuals and groups. These seeds do not just grow in the hearts, lives and minds of young men and women in other parts of the world. These seeds can grow in even our own lives. As the church, as people of the light, our privilege becomes to examine our own lives and to challenge others to examine theirs so that seeds of hate can be weeded out long before war and violent oppression take place.

The assertion that seeds of hate may be growing in our own lives will make many of us naturally defensive. After all, hatred is a strong word. I would suggest though that the seeds of hate are present in all our lives at times. They may not yet look like hate, but there are seeds planted in our lives, that if left unchallenged, if left hidden in the darkness will flourish into hatred. Perhaps it is the seed of indifference towards our neighbours and enemies. Perhaps it is the seed of unforgiveness towards someone who has hurt or offended us. Perhaps the seeds of resentment have taken a strong hold as we remember a past grievance. Perhaps it is the seed of greed which disables our ability to truly care for and consider the wellbeing of others, as our own desires and need to have becomes all that matters. Perhaps for others the seeds of hate begin as repressed anger over some real or perceived injustice. Disillusionment, marginalisation, or intense loneliness can also flourish into hatred for those who are understood to be the causes.

 Into this consideration of seeds and hatred come the words of John in his first letter. John begins by reminding the church that the darkness, which is full of hatred, violence, and war, is passing away and that the true light, the light of God and his kingdom reign has already begun shining. Yet, the influences of the darkness are still felt, and the seeds of hatred can still take root; even in the lives of those who strive to live in the light. John joins with Isaiah and David in declaring that in the kingdom of God there is no room for darkness and hatred. He clearly states in his letter that we cannot claim to be in the light, to be people of God, while hating a brother/sister- for if we do then we are still in the darkness of violence, death and destruction. In fact he goes so far as to say that “Whoever hates another believer is in the darkness, walks in the darkness, and does not know the way to go, because the darkness has brought on blindness (I John 2:11).” The presence of darkness and hatred in our lives, the presence of seeds that can grow into hate and violence is then for all of us a very serious problem. It becomes imperative that we invite God to join us as we seek to rip out the seeds of hate in our lives and the lives of others and leave room instead for the seeds of God’s justice and peace to grow.

What these verses and these seeds have to do with Remembrance Day is this; as we consider wars and conflicts of the past, we must also proactively face the potential for such violent actions as the result of hatred in the future. As we do so, we must not lose hope. We must not become afraid to live courageously as people of peace, who make peace, because they worship the Prince of Peace. As we rip out the seeds of hate in our own lives, as we challenge our neighbours to forgive and to walk in the light where there is no room for hate, we actively work for peace in our world. When men and women return from wars and we willingly acknowledge their anguish and moral confusion, we invite them to join us in the light of God’s forgiveness and grace. When we look seriously at the ramifications of asking another to repress their aversion to kill, and as we talk openly and frankly about the costs of war, we further the case for peace and peace making. We do all of this aware of John’s promise that the world and its desires will pass away, but those who do the will of God will live forever (I John 2:17).

The will of God is for us to make peace, and for humanity to live at peace. This peace is made possible through the violent death and glorious resurrection of Christ. Our sins, all of them; the sins of complacency about war, the sins committed during war, the sins of hatred for our enemy, the sins of too lightly and ignorantly asking too much of others on our behalf, the sins of indifference-all of these are forgiven and ended through Christ, the Prince of Peace. As we stop on Tuesday to remember, let us not forget the costs of war, but let us also not forget the need for peace. May we grow in our commitment to live in and through the Prince of Peace. May we look for and rip out the seeds of hate everywhere we see them. May we pray for peace, and may we long and work for it until the end of this age. Amen.