

OT: Jonah 3.1-5,10

NT: Hebrews 9.24-28

Gp: Mark 1.14-20

Above the desk in the Rector's office is a large, framed photograph of mostly old looking men, certainly sombre, in a procession through the garden here at the Parish Church. They are the great and the good of Liverpool on their way to a civic service here in church. The date is 12th November 1918.

They have every reason to be sombre, they were here to give thanks for the end of the war but it had been a bloody war of attrition that had resulted in the death of more than 15 million people and the wounding of at least another 20 million. Numbers hard to comprehend and across all of Europe and beyond, no-one had been untouched by the devastation.

The youth of so many nations had been crushed, the world changed forever but there was hope that this at least would be the war to end all wars. Sadly, we know better.

History tells us that the terms of the Treaty of Versailles were harsh, purposely so to put Germany in its place, to teach that nation a lesson for all time. But history also tells us that the Treaty had the reverse impact. It directly led to the rise of Nazism, as Hitler gave false hope to the people of Germany that he would make them great again.

And so the next generation was pulled into an even greater conflict which spread across the world and brought unbelievable devastation and destruction.

Wars keep happening because injustice and greed keep happening in our world. Just look at the conflicts that absorb our news bulletins, not to mention the ones that get little exposure such as in Yemen and Afghanistan. It seems that we struggle to be content with what we have, that there is an inherent element in human beings, that left unchecked, will aim to dominate those around them, dominate at any price.

I say *left unchecked*, because we all have access to a blessed restraint to try and keep us from such selfish behaviour. We have access to the love of God, through Jesus Christ.

"Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, and saying, 'The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news.'"

The kingdom of God is not the powerhouse of human dominions, it's not built on might and wealth as we understand them. God's ways are not our ways. The strength of the kingdom of God is built on love and sacrifice, starting with Jesus Christ, as the letter to the Hebrews says: *"he has appeared once for all at the end of the age to remove sin by the sacrifice of himself."*

And from his one, perfect sacrifice, we are called to put aside our greedy and egocentric ways and to put the needs of others first. In such a sacrifice, we gain a wealth and a peace that can only be obtained through the grace of God. Through putting others first, we gain our own happiness and contentment. This is God's commandment to love him with our whole being and to love our neighbours as ourselves. This is the gospel, the good news that we proclaim and must go on proclaiming.

After the slaughter of the First World War, many men who had witnessed so much atrocity turned away from church and from God believing that the words of Jonah were untrue: "*When God saw what they did, how they turned from their evil ways, God changed his mind about the calamity that he had said he would bring upon them; and he did not do it.*"

We have to have hope as so many that have gone before us have had. It is humanity who brings calamity through evil, not God. God is on our side and ultimately, evil will never prevail and one day wars will cease.

This morning as we think of all those people currently suffering the atrocities of war we pray:

Loving God, we seek Your divine intervention to heal the wounds of the world. We pray for leaders to make wise decisions that promote peace and justice. Strengthen the resolve of peacemakers and bring hope to those living in conflict. Let Your love and compassion prevail. Amen.

The Revd Michelle Montrose