



KIAMA ANGLICAN
CHURCHES

ANZAC Day 2021

Sermon – Aiden Sibrava

Psalm 46

Isaiah 2:1-5

ANZAC Day 2021

Theme: “Generations,” and how we relate to ANZAC.

Something that occurs to me in preaching for this service, is that the only things I know about war, I know second hand. Some of it is helpful; but I’m sure that some of it is rubbish.

It’s a difficult position to be in as a young person in the 21st Century reflecting on war. And I think that goes across the board. Our material prosperity and our distance from real conflict means that for the most part, for people like me...we imagine, we don’t *participate*. We can think about what war might mean, or how the technologies of war work, but we don’t see the reality. We don’t see what happens when those policies and technologies are applied and people die. Or if we do, we see it through a TV screen—which is a peculiar way to witness something. You see everything and can do *nothing*. That’s *not* a real experience.

Experience means *being there* in the boredom and the horror. Not the soundbites and the highlights. And we *aren’t*. We just aren’t.

But...soldiers know what war is. They know that it is *bad*.

It can be many other things. War can be ‘inevitable’. It may be ‘understandable’ or maybe even ‘*just*’—but it is certainly bad. It’s a particular kind of evil that I am sure I do not understand, because I have not been a soldier.

And that’s half the challenge of ANZAC day, isn’t it? I mean here are men (and many women now) who *know* that war is bad. They are our living testimony. They know the realities of war. But also they express the cost of it! Because although we don’t know war, we know *them*. We know how much they mean to us, because they’re fathers and mothers, they are mentors, leaders, sisters and brothers, and friends, who add so much to our lives. And we would be the poorer not to have them.

But soldiers here remind us of the ones who are *not* here, don’t they? That’s what it means to be a soldier.

And if we'd *really* listen, we can learn so much from the soldiers who are here.

But how are they able to speak about the bad-ness of war, and what they went through, if we only glorify it? How can they tell us that war is bad, if we exalt it as the birth of a nation? If we only glorify our past at war, we don't leave space to listen to people who need to tell us about very un-glorious things...to hear and then forgive, and love, the ones our nation sent to war. When we send someone to fight, we ask them to pay a high cost. It is expensive in terms of their wellbeing, their health, their friendships and, for some, their lives.

I wonder if we see that less, in our day? Because there's increasingly a gap between the public and war, isn't there? Today we think about ANZAC through the generations and it's interesting to think about how the public has related to armed conflict throughout time and generations.

So if you think about WWI and II, the public sent and the public went. Just about every family in Australia either sent someone or knew someone...and many died. As a nation we fought and as a nation we felt the loss. People learned that war is a fearful thing, because everyone knew someone who they had known and loved who was no more, or who was permanently changed.

Come forward through the years to Korea, Malaya, Indonesia and Vietnam, and our participation as a public changed. Whereas everyone was touched by WWI and II, the later wars were much smaller in terms of deployment. Even Vietnam, though relatively big, saw only 60,000 serve compared with over 500,000 who went overseas in WWII. So now you have a situation where the public send, and the public see and hear; and many paid a dear price but not everyone knew what that *really* meant. Whereas almost every family was touched by the pain of WWI and II. Vietnam Vets in particular found themselves alienated by a public who were somehow shocked by the ugliness of war, as though they shouldn't have known what that entailed. Why were we surprised and self-

righteous when it came to Vietnam? I think, in part, because we didn't go.

Army Chaplain Hugh Begbie writes: "Unless we have built our own moral glasshouse on the battlefields of Vietnam or Iraq, we must not throw stones at those whose houses lie shattered and broken. We **do not know** what they had to experience or the difficult choices they had to make."

And now you come to modern conflicts - the Gulf, Afghanistan, Iraq - and things have changed again. Very few went; our deployments have been much smaller and are made up of professional soldiers. The public...how do we relate to that? Well now more than ever, we see. GoPros and camera phones bring war into our homes; and yet as I said before, it's not a real seeing. When you see war on a TV screen, you're not really experiencing it. You can say nothing and do nothing to change the reality of what happens on the battlefield.

So there's this strange situation now where we can play the video games, watch the YouTube footage, feel the anger when we see how people like the Islamic State behave... We play the games, we see the videos, we feel the anger...but we *do not pay the cost*.

And you've got to wonder, what does that do to a generation? And what does that mean for the future of war? If I can, I'd like to reflect on that as a millennial and as a pastor.

As a millennial, I worry that it breeds contempt for war, and for warriors. We're now in a position where I can play a video game and know how a weapons platform works, and I can watch a video and see what Northern Afghanistan looks like in winter snow. Does that mean I understand what it's like to be deployed at Tarin Kowt? **NO!** Because I don't have to live with the reality of that, and I can turn the TV off whenever I want. I don't have to sit there with a wounded mate and wait for a helicopter to *maybe* get there safely. As the public, we don't understand. And maybe in *thinking* we understand, we understand all the less.

I've wondered about that in the language around ANZAC day. Last week I was careless and I said we'd 'celebrate' ANZAC today. No! 'Commemorate', give thanks for, recognise, remember - those are all good words. But 'celebrating' ANZAC? That was careless. Only a civvie or a propagandist could think we 'celebrate' our wars. And yet—I plugged it into Google—18,000 results talk of 'celebrating' the day. Have we lost the plot? Do we know what war really means?

I was talking to a mate who's a veteran, and he said: "No one wants to see war less than somebody who's gone to war." You know we can think war is exciting, it's history-making, it's thrilling; and it *might* be those things, but it is also *bad*. And tanks and planes are cool, until they're used for what they're made for.

I think if we're not careful, if we don't really listen to our veterans, we won't understand them, and we won't understand war; and I fear that that will cost us.

Now, what about as a pastor? This is me speaking not as a millennial, but as someone reading God's thoughts: what does he have to say about war?

The first thing to know is that God is a warrior; he knows what war is. Exodus 15:3 Moses says, "*The Lord is a man of war, the Lord is his Name.*" Jeremiah 20:11 the prophet says that *the Lord is with me as a dread-warrior*. You see like every veteran, God knows what war is. He's walked the sands of Palestine beside armies through the ages. And the Lord has a warrior's reaction to war. It's not the reaction of a warrior in the moment who says, "I've won, and I'm alive. Thank God. And look at this poor beggar."

No! It's the reaction of a warrior who has *lived* with that. Who's turned it over in his mind's eye, and lain awake at night wondering about how things might've been different if he were a moment faster, or a moment slower. And we see in our readings that—having lived with war and its consequences—God says one day there will be no more.

Ps. 46: 7

The Lord Almighty is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress. 8 Come and see what the Lord has done, the desolations he has brought on the earth. 9 He makes wars cease to the ends of the earth. He breaks the bow and shatters the spear; he burns the shields with fire. 10 He says, 'Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth.' 11 The Lord Almighty is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress.

The Psalm speaks of a global peace, enforced by the ultimate peacekeeper. God *makes* wars cease. In his supreme power we're told that he breaks the weapons of war and burns the shields with fire. There's a kind of **violence-towards-violence** where we get this image of God, as though he's personally gone into the armouries of humanity, and he's in there breaking longbows and snapping spears, and dousing shields in kero to burn them. In this act of violence-towards-violence, he removes our ability to make war.

And I would suggest that that is the foundation of a 'just war', if any war can ever be just: it is a 'violence-towards-violence.' It destroys, to end destruction. As does God. Of course, that's ultimately Jesus—that's the cross. His is a death to *end* the dying.

Again in the book of Isaiah, we see God's promise of a future where our energy for war will be diverted into better things:

Isaiah 2:4

4 [S. God] will judge between the nations and will settle disputes for many peoples. They will beat their swords into ploughshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not take up sword against nation, nor will they train for war any more.

God knows what war is. God is a warrior. And as a warrior, he knows that war is bad. And so he promises a future where war will

be a memory. The tools of war will be broken and burned; or else repurposed—swords for ploughshares, spears for pruning hooks.

What does it mean for us on ANZAC day?

Get our heads right. Don't assume you know what war is just because you've read the book. If you want to know what war *really* is - ask a soldier! You'll see plenty in the next week.

And listen to God! The one who knows our comings and goings; the one who knows war better than any of us and calls us to look forward to a day when war will be no more. Violence-towards-violence ends the violence...and the Cross of Christ brings us peace with God. Seek to live in light of that reality. Seek peace and pursue it; seek peace with God.

Hosea 6:1 (ESV) *Come, let us return to the LORD; for he has torn us, that he may heal us; he has struck us down, and he will bind us up.*

If God goes to war, it is only so that there might be an *end* to war. Redemption from war. Forgiveness and resurrection. When Christ died, it was to put an end to death. So let's follow him in how we live...lest we forget, what war really is.