



Sermon Notes: Steve Stanis,

27 April 2025

“A Sense of Urgency of the Good News of Jesus.”

Readings: John 18:33-37; Ephesians 2:1-20 Colossians 3:12-17

ANZAC Day

Introduction:

The phrase, popularised by the song ‘Give Me a Home Among the Gumtrees’, evokes a strong sense of Australian identity and belonging. “There’s no place like home!” There’s something special about home and homecomings.

ANZAC Day reminds us of the profound yearning for home - both the earthly homes our servicemen and women fought to protect, and our eternal home in God's kingdom.

ANZAC Day is a solemn occasion for remembrance, reflection, and gratitude. As we approach this day, we remember that God’s Kingdom is not of this world and recommit to proclaiming the gospel of peace with urgency. The Kingdom of God is our true homecoming.

The Reality of War in a Fallen World:

War entered human history in the Garden of Eden when humanity first turned from God. This fracture in our relationship with our Creator led to broken relationships with each other. We see this pattern continue throughout human history.

(James 4:1-2) cuts to the heart of conflict:

"What causes fights and quarrels among you?

Don't they come from your desires that battle within you?

You desire but do not have, so you kill.

You covet but you cannot get what you want, so you quarrel and fight.

You do not have because you do not ask God."

Today, we recognise not only the physical toll of war but its deep spiritual and moral impact.

Veterans carry both visible and invisible wounds, what we now understand as "moral injury," the profound trauma that comes from witnessing and participating in the harsh realities of conflict. These wounds remind us that war, even when deemed necessary, leaves lasting scars on the human soul, that only Christ can heal. As we remember the sacrifice of **all** who served, we acknowledge our Indigenous servicemen and women.

They fought bravely for a nation that often denied them basic rights and recognition.

Upon returning home, many First Nation soldiers faced continued discrimination, denied the benefits given to their fellow servicemen and women. Their story reminds us that our call to justice and reconciliation is part of our culture, part of the fabric of Australian society.

As we look at the microcosm of Kiama society, we think of the homeless who surround our property and out into the issue of homelessness Australian society must address. Both homeless individuals and unknown soldiers in unmarked graves, represent lives forgotten by society, highlighting issues of neglect and loss of identity.

Many homeless people, including veterans, struggle with trauma, unemployment, and systemic failures, mirroring the lack of support that led to soldiers being buried without recognition. While nations honour unknown soldiers in remembrance ceremonies, the ongoing crisis of homelessness, especially among veterans, remains largely invisible.

I'm pleased that here in Kiama, this conversation has begun. We must commit to ensuring that all who wear our nation's uniform are treated with the equality and respect they deserve. Their courage and sacrifice have helped shape the freedoms and values we cherish today.

On this ANZAC Day, we remember not only their bravery on the battlefield but also our shared responsibility to build a nation that upholds the ideals of equality, mateship, and a fair go for all.

Citizens of Another Kingdom:

Jesus' words to Pilate ring clear: *"My kingdom is not of this world"* (John 18:36).

This profound statement shapes how we as Christians approach national remembrance.

While we honour those who served, we remember that our ultimate allegiance lies with Christ's Kingdom. This higher calling doesn't diminish our earthly citizenship but rather transforms how we live it out.

In (Ephesians 2:15), Paul speaks of how Christ has created; *"one new humanity,"* transcending the divisions of nationality, race, and politics. This new identity in Christ calls us to be agents of peace and reconciliation in our communities.

There's a saying that captures this spirit perfectly:

*"When you have more than you need,
build a longer table, not a higher fence."*

This wisdom reflects Christ's own ministry. He consistently chose inclusion over exclusion, extending His table to those societies would rather fence out.

When we understand this ministry of reconciliation, we see that building longer tables isn't just a nice metaphor, it's a vital expression of Christ's kingdom coming to earth.

Every time we extend our table rather than fortify our fences, we demonstrate the radical peace of God's kingdom. As the table is extended, there is more seating for all, more room for acceptance, understanding, and healing.

In Christ, no one is left standing on the margins; all are invited to sit, to belong, and to share in the feast of grace.

This is the heart of reconciliation, not just welcoming others, but making space for them, ensuring they are seen, heard, and valued.

As we embrace this calling, we reflect the boundless love of Christ, who prepares a place for all at His table, where divisions cease, and true peace is found.

The Urgency of Peace and Reconciliation:

ANZAC Day serves not to glorify war, but to soberly remember its cost.

Each life lost represents both a sacrifice for nation and a reminder of our calling to be peacemakers.

This peace isn't merely the absence of conflict but the presence of right relationships, with God, with each other and within our world.

The urgency of this message cannot be overstated.

In a world still torn by conflict, the Church must model a different way.

Living as Peacemakers:

What does peace look like? Paul provides practical guidance in (Colossians 3:12-14):

He says,

"Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience.

Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity."

I thought of a practical example of this, paradoxically in a time of war. On Christmas Eve in 1914, amidst the horrors of World War I, something extraordinary happened. Along the Western Front, soldiers from opposing sides, British, French, and German, laid down their weapons and emerged from the trenches. They exchanged greetings, sang carols, and even played football together. For a brief moment, the spirit of peace overcame the brutality of war.

Enemies became brothers, if only for a night, reminding us that peace is always possible, even in the darkest of times. This moment in history illustrates the power of peace and reconciliation.

The soldiers who participated in the Christmas Truce demonstrated what Paul calls us to embrace compassion, kindness, and love. Even in a time of war, they showed that the human spirit is capable of reaching across divisions to find common ground.

As a church committed to being prayerful people, connected in unity and humility, and transformed by Jesus, this call to peace is pursued in four ways:

1. Deepen Our Prayer Life:

Prayer must become the heartbeat of our peace-making efforts. Each day we must seek God's peace in our hearts, our homes, and our world. We actively claim the victory that Christ has won for us.

This commitment to prayer isn't passive waiting but active preparation, God's Spirit transforming our hearts and guiding our actions as we engage in His work of reconciliation.

2. Strengthen Our Connections:

Building authentic relationships that reflect God's kingdom requires intentional effort to truly listen to and learn from those with different experiences.

I think of Mother Teresa, who has left a lasting impact on me and my expression of faith after meeting her. She saw the eyes of Christ in everyone she ministered to. With this same mindset we demonstrate Christ's love through practical care and genuine friendship, showing that unity is possible even amid diversity. These connections become bridges of understanding and healing in our community.

3. Live in Unity and Humility:

The hard work of peace-making begins with the humility to admit when we're wrong and seek forgiveness both from God and others. We must listen for the voice of God.

This will help us approach conflicts with a genuine desire to understand rather than just to be heard. We demonstrate true unity by willingly setting aside our own preferences for the sake of others, actively seeking ways to serve, especially those different from us, and creating spaces where reconciliation can flourish.

This commitment to unity and humility becomes a powerful testimony to the transforming power of Christ's love in our community.

4. Allow Jesus to Transform Us:

Submitting to the Holy Spirit's work means allowing Him to reshape our attitudes toward those we might consider "other", transform our responses, and deepen our understanding of what true peace looks like.

This transformation manifests in choosing words that build up rather than tear down, using our resources to create spaces of welcome, standing with those who face injustice, and sharing Christ's message of forgiveness and restoration with gentleness and respect.

As we yield to this transforming work, we become a community who experience the reality of God's Kingdom, a Kingdom where tables are long, and fences are few.

When we live this way, following Christ's example of sacrificial love and active peace-making, we become living testimonies to the peace that only He can bring.

Our actions speak louder than words, demonstrating that the gospel of peace isn't just a message to be preached but a reality to be lived. It compels us to extend our tables rather than fortify our fences, to seek understanding rather than maintain divisions, to pursue reconciliation rather than nurse grievances.

The Ultimate Sacrifice:

On ANZAC Day, we often quote (John 15:13);

"Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends."

While this verse rightfully honours those who made the ultimate sacrifice in war, it points us to an even greater reality, Christ's sacrifice for all humanity.

His death and resurrection provide the only true foundation for lasting peace.

Until that day when God's eternal Kingdom comes, we are called to be ambassadors of Christ's peace. This doesn't mean ignoring the reality of evil or the necessity sometimes faced by nations to defend against aggression. Rather, it means working tirelessly for peace while holding firmly to the hope we have in Christ.

The Urgent Call of Christ's Peace:

In a world torn by conflict and division, the message of Christ's peace carries profound urgency. Without Him, we remain trapped in cycles of hostility and brokenness, distant from the fullness of life God intends for us. Every moment spent building walls instead of tables, every opportunity for reconciliation left untaken, represents more than just missed potential, it perpetuates the very divisions Christ came to heal.

(Ephesians 2:4-5) reminds us of God's initiative:

*"But because of his great love for us,
God, who is rich in mercy,
made us alive with Christ,
even when we were distant."*

The gospel's urgency stems from its transformative power. In Christ, we discover not just the absence of conflict but the presence of active peace-making love. For our own spiritual health, we cannot delay in embracing Christ's call.

For our communities' wellbeing, we cannot postpone the work of reconciliation. As we remember the cost of conflict on ANZAC Day, let us also remember the cost of inaction in sharing Christ's peace.

The world desperately needs to know there is another way, a way of forgiveness, reconciliation, of healing, of a true and lasting peace found only in Jesus.

This is not a message that can wait for tomorrow. The time for peace-making, for bridge-building, for table-lengthening, is now.

Conclusion:

And may we pray with hope for the day when, as (Psalm 46:9) promises, God *"makes wars cease to the ends of the earth."*

...and Christ's peace will reign.

Amen