

Reconciliation

St Georges Anglican Church Epsom
ANZAC Day Service 25th April 2010
Rev Andrew Osborn

If these walls could talk

Joseph Edward Wood
Killed in action in France August 1st 1917
Aged 20 years

Major Geoffrey de Dohun Devereux MC
1st Batt. Auckland Infantry Regiment
Killed in action in France Oct 1st 1918
Aged 28 years

Sgt Alan T B Gordon
2nd NZ Rifle Brigade
Killed in action in France May 25th 1916
Aged 22 years

Mary Dorothy Latchmore
Army Nurse during the Great War
Aug 7th 1914 – Nov 11th 1918
Entered into rest 24th Jan 1939

If only these walls could talk
If only these plaques had lips and tongues

It seems to me that we,
Christians included,
of which I count myself as one
have done two things when it comes to war.
We have either deified it or demonised it.
We have either deified war as a lesser Calvary
And in so doing sanctioned things that we never would want to,
Or we have demonised it
Abandoned people we never would have wanted to.
And alienated others with whom we ought to have sought
reconciliation.

Questions

During the 20th Century Australians and New Zealanders fought side by side, in the felts of South Africa, the deserts of North Africa, in the paddy fields of the Korea, the jungles of Malaya & Vietnam, and the rocky outcrops of Afghanistan.

I was about 12 years old when the Vietnam war ended.
My parents shielded me from the graphic pictures televised on our broadcast news.
Many of the people of my generation and younger have no experience of war and therefore little understanding of it

I suspect the people of my generation and younger come to Anzac day with questions.

Why did Australians and New Zealanders land, fight and die on a shore in Turkey on the 25th April 1915?
Why did we in the first fifteen months of World War 2 send air men to Britain, warships to the Northern hemisphere, and an army to the eastern Mediterranean where it fought mainly in the deserts of North Africa?
Why did nearly every conflict we were involved in the last two centuries take place in the Northern Hemisphere, seemingly far from our shores and our interests.
More recently, we look back on Vietnam, Iraq and Afghanistan with suspicion,
wars initiated by the dubious interests of other nations.

My suspicion is that many people of my generation and younger come to Anzac Day with confusions, misunderstandings and questions.
At one level we are revolted by war...

Identity

But strangely in another way,
we are drawn into the Anzac tradition
In 2004, I travelled through Turkey with Jenny
and an old friend, Monte
I walked the battlefields of Gallipoli,
Anzac Cove, Lone Pine & Chanuk Bair
We are drawn into the Anzac tradition
For we sense that something unique and essential of what it means to be Australian, a New Zealander is hidden within.

mateship, toughness, self-reliance, a larrikin irreverence, sardonic
humour, lack of respect for unearned authority
rugged, enterprising,
ready to throw the rulebook away when its rules proved inadequate
we're all equal, no one jumps the queue

Stories

But for those of you who did experience war either first hand
or through the lives of those most close to you,
My suspicion is that you do not come to Anzac Day with questions or
a search for identity

My suspicion is you come with stories.

You had no part in the decision for war.

You just did your best to do your best to make this world a better
place as you thought best.

And today you come here to remember, to remember friends, places
and times.

My suspicion is that in past you were told not tell your stories...

An earlier generation was told it wouldn't help and they wouldn't
understand

And a later generation were shamed into silence, by a public that no
longer believed in the war you fought for them

We have a generation many of whom feel cut off from their elders.

It is my own feeling that for those who feel able and some don't

And for those who of you who would like to, and some won't,
to tell us your stories.

And for the generation who never experience what our forbears have
to listen.

For I believe it is through the telling of our stories that my generation
will become the richer, wiser, emotionally more together and the
closer to you for it.

My suspicion is that you come to tell your stories to people who will
understand.

And no doubt the stories that you will tell will be funny, sad, heroic
and otherwise.

I am reminded of Shakespeare's Coriolanus and his refusal to bear his
wounds after battle that was the custom in ancient Rome.

And I compare that image of understandable reluctance with the words of Robert Bly, the author of *Iron John* who said...
“Your weaknesses are your gold, they are what you have to give to society.”

Hospitality

As you know from the start the Gallipoli campaign went horribly wrong
the first troops landed 3 km north of the planned landing-place
the Anzacs who followed encountered sheer cliffs rather than climbable slopes,
they were met by the Turkish Army’s 19th Division
commanded by Mustafa Kemal Bey,
who told his troops,
“I do not order you to advance. I order you to die.”

Mustafa Kemal Bey, later known as Kemal Ataturk,
went on to become the founder of the post-war Turkish Republic.

In 1934 he uttered these now famous words...
“You the mothers, who sent your sons from far away countries, wipe away your tears. Your sons are now lying in our bosom and are in peace...”

They are words that are surprisingly modern in sentiment
They speak of reconciliation

Reconciliation

St Paul said in a letter to the Christians in the city of Ephesus,
whose ruins lie in what is now modern Turkey.

“But now in Christ, you who were once far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For he is our peace, in his flesh he has made both groups into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is the hostility between us... that he might create in himself one new humanity in the place of the two, thus making peace, and might reconcile both groups to God in one body through the cross...”

Ephesians 2: 13-16 (NRSV)

In its original context St Paul’s primary focus is upon the estrangement between Gentile and Jew

At one level both harboured hostile attitudes toward one another
Greeks despised those who lived outside their cities calling them
ethne, which we usually translate as 'pagans'
Jews spoke of non-Jews using the same Greek word, *ethne*, which we
translate as 'Gentiles'
Ironically, they used the same Greek word of abuse

At another level they were divided theologically
for once they were divided by the law
estranged as they followed other gods or no gods
the death of Jesus brings Jew and Gentile together
now as the law reaches fulfilment in Christ
we are untied by grace
we are united in the service of the God and Father of our Lord Jesus
Christ

Perhaps all that needs to be said is that...
When Jesus died on the cross he did so to bring about reconciliation
Reconciliation within humanity
And between humanity and God

It seems to me that Anzac day is a reconciliation moment
an opportunity, a time where friendships might be restored,
relationships deepened...

Reconciliation is a value deep in heart of our God
Anzac Day is a unique moment in our cultural landscape for
reconciliation...
Reconciliation with old foes
between those who served and those who did not
in the recounting and listening of stories
a possibility that friendships might be restored, deepened
friendships between fathers and sons
grandparents and grandchildren
extended family members
family friends
former enemies may become friends
For God in Christ reconciled has the world to himself
and has created out of a divided humanity one new humanity

The Rev. Andrew T. Osborn