

## WAR AND PEACE

Sound, sound the clarion, fill the fife,  
Throughout the sensual world proclaim,  
One crowded hour of glorious life  
Is worth an age without a name.

That was written by Thomas Osbert Mordaunt during the Seven Years' War in the middle of the 18th century - and it was quoted by Sir Walter Scott as a chapter heading in his novel 'Old Mortality'. The whole poem is an appeal to a young man to leave his wife and child and domestic comforts to do his duty as a soldier, and it depicts civilian life as dull, unheroic, soft, even shameful.

It may seem odd to begin a comment in a service about peace by speaking of war. But can the two be separated? And why is peace so difficult to achieve and to maintain?

What is peace?

Jesus tells us to be peace-makers - How do we do that?

You may have listened to this year's Reith lectures on Radio 4, by the Canadian historian Margaret Macmillan. She examined our complex relationship with war, and wondered whether war was an essential part of being human. Let's admit it: We often do admire the military virtues; we support conflict when we consider it to be justified; military action is exciting, especially to young people; in times of war, people may find a purpose and a role which may otherwise have been lacking in their lives

But peace is more than just the absence of conflict. Qualities such as courage, self-sacrifice, endurance of suffering - are all found in civilian life as well as on the battlefield - albeit in different spheres and responding to different challenges.

The challenges we face in peace, the problems, the issues to be addressed, are maybe less dramatic but just as troubling as those of wartime - and they are often deep-rooted and intractable. They are enemies of a different kind to be fought. Think of the Beveridge Report of 1942 - written in the throes of a world war, but looking forward to better times, when five "Giant Evils" in society would be remedied. Those five evils, or enemies, were thought at that time to be squalor, ignorance, want, idleness (i.e. unemployment), and disease. And the post-war social security system and the National Health Service were set up to tackle them. Peace in 1945 was a positive opportunity to reform, renew and repair - to make things better. And not just in our own country, but throughout the world.

Sadly, those same evils have not been completely conquered and eradicated, and others have arisen too. We might add now as a new enemy, destruction of the planet by climate change. So peace is not a time to be idle and self-indulgent, but a time to put talents and energy and creativity into new channels. Because there will always be evils to fight and conflicts to deal with - waiting for someone - waiting for us? - to confront them.

What else can peace mean?

There are hundreds of references to peace in the Bible (one source says 429 in KJV) and they show that the Hebrew word *shalom* means not just absence of war or

conflict but much more. (I am indebted to David Stec for his entry in the Hebrew dictionary.) Shalom conveys an inward sense of wholeness or completeness; a sense of safety and security that brings tranquility of mind. Well-being - of an individual or of society. Harmony with others. Reconciliation that ends conflict. These meanings do not suggest a flat and empty kind of peace; they convey purpose and confidence, trust and effort.

(In Islam too, the word *salaam*, from the same root, means being in harmony, in a right relationship, with God and your fellow beings and the world.)

So we can experience this kind of peace even in times of trouble, conflict, distress. This is the meaning in the Aaronic blessing - which we know and love - "The Lord lift up his countenance upon you, and give you peace". Israel at that point is about to go and conquer the Promised Land - so 'peace' in that blessing is not the absence of war. It means an inner peace based on knowing that whatever happened, they were under God's protection. And when people bravely endure long imprisonment, or torture, or pain, or disastrous life circumstances - this is the inner peace that sustains them and gives them courage.

Isaiah said, 'You (God) keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on you, because he trusts in you.' So our trust in God is an important factor. But we don't earn this peace - it is a gift, a blessing. Jesus said, 'Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you.' But then he goes on, 'Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid.' This is the peace that is way beyond our human understanding. And it needs our trust in God's guidance to find it.

Jesus also said, 'Blessed are the peacemakers. Judith is going to speak later about peace-making.

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