

Sunday 5 August, 2018

A sermon preached by The Reverend Canon Christopher Carolane, Canon Pastor on the Feast of The Transfiguration of the Lord, and Hiroshima Peace Day, 2018

Readings: Daniel 7 : 9-10; 13-14; 2 Peter 1 : 16-19; Mark 9 : 2-10

Somebody once said, “Memories are like a garden. Regularly tend the pleasant blossoms and remove the invasive weeds.”

Today we have come to worship God and to remember.

We remember with horror the event that occurred at 8.15am on August 6, 1945 when the first atomic bomb used in war, code named “Little Boy”, was dropped by the United States on the city of Hiroshima in Japan – effectively obliterating the city and causing the death of 140,000 people. The devastation of that event is one that the world can never forget. Sadly it is but one memory of all the memories of war throughout the history of humanity. The event itself was horrific, as are all acts of violence committed in war.

The fact is, war is terrible. Full stop. Full Stop. Full Stop.

When we remember the horror of that day in 1945, we are reminded of so many other acts of violence by humans against humans which have resulted in the destruction and maiming of life and the continuing and ongoing effects of Post-Traumatic Stress on the many who remain who witnessed it. Memories of war are those invasive weeds in the garden of our memories.

But this is not all we remember today. On 6 August and every 6 August, the Christian church remembers the transfiguration of the Lord Jesus on the mountain. This memory is a sweet blossom in the garden of our memories.

This memory proclaims the purity and wonder of Jesus Christ as the promised King who was to die himself so that all may enjoy eternal life in Him.

That scene saw just three men, Peter, James and John walking to the top of a high mountain with Jesus. There they experienced a supernatural event. Jesus was miraculously changed so that his clothes became dazzling white – whiter than anyone could bleach them.

The symbolism of this white transformation should not escape us. One commentator notes that white was an unusual colour in ancient Palestine because it soiled easily and thus was not very practical. Its mention here signifies something unusual as white is the colour of purity most often identified with God’s saints.

Suddenly two others – Moses and Elijah - representing the coming together of the Law and the Prophets, joined them. How Peter, James and John recognised Moses and Elijah whom they had never known is not told to us. But perhaps this is irrelevant given the amazing and supernatural nature of the moment. Impetuous Peter suggested building three booths, one for Moses, one for Elijah and one for Jesus, perhaps to try to make a permanent memorial of the moment when in Peter's mind the Law, the Prophets and the Messiah came together as equals. Of course such thinking that the three should be equal is something that is not the case as the Messiah is so much more important than the other two.

It was then that a cloud overshadowed them. In the history of Israel, God often had appeared in a cloud, and often on a mountain. Thus in every way this was indicative of a true epiphany or revelation of God's presence. And in the midst of this came a voice from heaven with the same simple message as was proclaimed at Jesus' baptism by the same heavenly voice: **"This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him!"** And suddenly Moses and Elijah were gone and there remained only Jesus, Peter, James and John.

As I pondered this scene again in the past week, it suddenly hit me as to just how significant this message was. The Jewish people had based their whole religion on what was written in the Law and on what had been spoken by the Prophets. But at this point in time on the mountain of transfiguration God said forget all that, **"this is my Son. You need to listen to HIM!"**

My brothers and sisters this message to Peter, James and John has been recorded for our benefit as **we also** need to listen to Jesus, God's one and only Son who is the saviour of the whole world.

So what did Jesus say that we should listen to? Most of Jesus' words were radical and life transforming.

Jesus said that to truly obey the commandments of God we should ***Love God, and love our neighbour as ourselves.*** (Luke 10.27)

More than that, Jesus said that we should love those who are our enemies and we should pray for those who persecute us (Matthew 5:44).

St Luke records Jesus saying, *"Love your enemies and do good to those who hate you."* (Luke 6:27)

Not only did Jesus urge his followers to be people of love, he urged them to be people of **peace**. St John records Jesus saying, *“Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you”* (as ambassador’s of peace) (John 20:21).

In the Acts of the Apostles Luke reminds us concerning Jesus’ instruction to be people of peace when he wrote: *“You know the message he sent to the people of Israel, preaching **peace** by **Jesus Christ—he is Lord of all.**”* (Acts 10:36)

Jesus’ words of love and peace are words that we need to listen to. I think it is important to make a distinction between hearing what Jesus says and truly **listening to what Jesus says**.

Mere hearing is not enough. Hearing simply means that our ears receive the words and they register in our brain. But if we truly **listen** to someone, not only are their words registered in our brain, we take those words on board and **we act on them**.

Hearing is not enough. We must LISTEN and in listening ACT.

St Paul wrote to the Romans, *“... it is not the **hearers** of the law who are righteous in God’s sight, but the **doers** of the law who will be justified.”* (Romans 2:13)

And James wrote: *“be doers of the word, and not merely hearers who deceive themselves. ²³ For if any are hearers of the word and not doers, they are like those who look at themselves in a mirror; ²⁴ for they look at themselves and, on going away, immediately forget what they were like. ²⁵ But those who look into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and persevere, being not hearers who forget but doers who act—they will be blessed in their doing.”* (James 1.22 – 25).

Jesus calls us to be **people of love and people of peace**.

As we recall again the atrocities that occurred in Hiroshima and Nagasaki 73 years ago, we need to remember that Jesus calls us to be people of love and people of peace. There is no place amongst the people of God for hatred and aggression. God’s only Son, Jesus Christ, calls us to show our love for him by how we love others. He calls us to be bringers of peace, as he was the “Bringer of Peace” *par excellence!*

As we remember those 140,000 souls who lost their lives through a senseless act of war, we must commit ourselves to caring for their families and friends who still mourn their death. We must be bringers of peace in the societies in which we now live and work as we proclaim with boldness the message of salvation that Jesus came to bring.

Let us pray.

Now may the God of peace, who brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant,²¹ make you complete in everything good so that you may do his will, working among us that which is pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be the glory forever and ever. Amen. (Hebrews 13:20)