

Remembrance Sunday: Finding Home

Bishop Greg Thompson

Remembrance Sunday: Finding Home – John 15

Recognise me as Herbie's grandpa – thank you to Fr Peter for inviting me to preach on this service of remembrance.

We reflect today on the impact of war and peacemaking in Australia's experience and hold in prayer those who still carry the physical, mental and spiritual wounds of conflict in the defence of our nation and in the service of those who needed defending. The enormous loss of Australian 62,000 lives in WW1, the 160,000 injured and the extraordinary grief and loss across our communities led to communities and churches building memorials and creating public and private rituals to help with the grief and trauma. Historian Jay Winter wrote "it is not an exaggeration to suggest that every family was in mourning: most for a relative – a father, a son, a brother, a husband – others for a friend, a colleague, a lover, a companion." Jay Winter Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning: the Great War in European cultural history 1995. Compounding with the arrival of the Spanish Flu 1919, the nation was traumatised and had to find a way to grieve and recover by remembering the fallen and those who sacrificed their lives. – 'Lest we forget'.

In Newcastle Cathedral where I served as bishop there is a golden book with all the names of the those who died in the first world war from the region. Not unlike the books found in most churches throughout Australia. Uniquely the golden book of Newcastle Cathedral had its beautiful gold cover made from the melted down wedding and engagement rings of the women who lost partners. The gold chosen to underscore how precious the

people within it and how profound the sorrow that was endured by those who read them.

Trauma leaves its mark in the memory of people and in the landscape. This is the human experience of nations and individuals. It is in the experience of conflict and of great loss as people come to terms with a disorientation of what they knew as home and safe harbour and face internal and external threats.

Remembrance Day and Anzac Day alongside other public days of remembering well are significant days of trying to make sense of trauma and allow the community to support the traumatised. Therapist and writer Bessel van der Kolk in his book 'the Body keeps the score: Mind, brain and body in the transformation of trauma' 2014; "After trauma the world becomes sharply divided between those who know and those who don't. People who have not shared the traumatic experience cannot be trusted, because they cannot understand it."

Such trauma is not only carried by survivors of war, but within communities where there has been radical loss to a way of life and to individuals who have had their safety taken from them. Susan Brison a survivor of rape and attempted murder writes ; "it is only by remembering and narrating the past – telling our stories and listening to others – that we can participate in an ongoing, active construction of a narrative of liberation, not one that confines us to a limiting past, but one that forms a background from which a freely imagined – and desired future can emerge." *Aftermath: Violence and the remaking of Self* 2002.

Is this not what we are doing in the reading of ancient scriptures, the rituals of eucharist and prayer? Retelling our stories of faith and failure, to remember well who we are and where our home is? And so to make space for healing and grace for our wounds.

As we mark Naidoc week with the theme 'always was, always will be' we can support and stand with first peoples the acknowledgement of the trauma upon their culture and peoples and stand with them as they remember their history and relationship to this land we call Australia. As they retell their pain and loss this is not a threat to our history or identity but an invitation to have understanding and be in companionship as they re imagine a better future. This will make us a nation that attends to its wounds and finds a way to celebrate the past without denying its shadows. To truly make it our home for all who were born here and who have come to our shores.

Kerry and I have lived and ministered in the NT over 4 decades – as a youth worker, later priest, army padre, and then as bishop. We had the privilege of working with Indigenous people. Over 40 years ago I met with a traditional indigenous owner of Kakadu – Old Bill. Some of you would know of Ubirr rock in Kakadu national park. It is a very large monolith rising above the flood plains where many tourists visit for the view and the extraordinary Aboriginal rock gallery of art for over 40,000 years.

This is the place in the wet season that is above the floodwaters where traditional people gather to tell stories, conduct ritual and thrive around fires above the floods. As water rises on the flood plains indigenous people locate to higher ground – and so do the animals. The paintings are of the animals and ancestors. This is a place of dreaming. And the generations of paintings tell of the hopes and hazards, the law and the community that is in the hearts of people. Old Bill took me to this place and showed me some of the paintings sharing a little of the significance of ancient visions that sustained a people. One set of paintings was particularly important to him. There was a large ochre coloured outline of a hand, and a little child's hand alongside it. He said this was his father's hand and his own small child hand alongside

it. I was moved by the tenderness and the history of that dreaming place.

And I wondered where my dreaming place was in this ancient landscape. For I am a sojourner, traveling and living in many places among many people, whose ancestors came from distant lands sometimes without a choice and as someone who has been traumatised through my early years and has had to attend to the trauma of child abuse in the church.

In John's gospel Jesus uses this word "to make a home" or abide with the history and hope of God's abiding presence in the land and temple in mind. God's abiding presence in the home of the temple is now located in Christ and that presence is being made real to his disciples. In John chapter 1 opening words – God pitched his tent among us, in the Word made flesh.

In John 15, Jesus teaches that our home it is not so much our efforts to find or make a home or temple, but home is what God does in our hearts. John 15:9 "As the Father loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love." God is our heavenly homemaker who sets up camp in us.

For those who carry trauma hear Jesus' words "Abide in my love." (John 15:9). Finding 'Sanctuary' a place of rest and safety is a huge task for the traumatized. Church communities can embody sanctuary through church buildings and grounds, as places of prayer, oasis and renewal where people do not have to be on guard. However Jesus calls to us, to have a 'sanctuary' at the heart of our work and relationships. To nurture a spirituality with the help of a community to be nourished, so that our story may be heard and that we may belong.

In 1972, the Times magazine called Dr Robert Coles 'the most influential living psychiatrist in the US' His literary work 'Children of Crisis' series received a Pulitzer prize in 1973.

Coles began to distrust the trad psychiatric method, of an

expert sitting at a desk listening to a patient and then choosing an appropriate treatment. He needed to cross the bridge between observer and observed. – ‘ to bring alive the innerness of those lives’. He did this by going among the most marginalised people in the US – the migrant, black and poor communities, and listening to their stories. He became the student and they the teacher. (P95-96 Yancey); In the 1960’s Ruby Bridges 6 yr old African American crossed the gauntlet of protest lines every day to attend school moving through white faces that shouted abuse and threatened her. Coles watched and studied this girl from the view point of how do children live with great stress. It took some time for him to earn the trust of her family as no white person had entered her house before. He thought he’d come to treat a disadvantaged person but the roles were reversed. Ruby became his teacher. 6 yr old Ruby prayed as she embarked on her school day, for herself, that she would be strong and unafraid, and for her enemies, that God would forgive them. ‘Jesus prayed on the cross’ she told Coles, ‘Forgive them, because they don’t know what they’re doing’.

.... I have known human beings who, in the face of unbearable daily stress, respond with resilience, even nobility. And I have known others who live in a comfortable, even luxurious environment and yet seem utterly lost. We have both sides in all of us, and that’s what the bible says, isn’t it? The bible shows us both hope and doom, the possibility and the betrayal. In its stories, sometimes the favourite becomes fatally tempted and sometimes the lowly and obscure one becomes an agent of hope if not salvation. I believe those stories are part of each of us.’ P112 P Yancey.

Jesus said; ‘And I appointed you to go and bear fruit.” (Jhn 15:16) ‘Sanctuary’ is always in relationship with ‘Pilgrimage’ in the spiritual life. We will be renewed only as we trust in God and choose to be open to the wonder of God’s love along the way. This means that the sanctuary does not need to be a

fortress against the world, frightened of change but open to the call of Christ to follow him. Such an awareness leads us to times of refreshment we thought weren't possible if we had stayed in the shelter of sanctuary only and not at the edges of life, bearing the fruit of love and faith. Such a 'Pilgrimage' is not a kind of tourism, passing through the world as if we are only observers – for we are children of God who are called to bear fruit as we companion the burden bearers of our time.

On this Remembrance Day as we companion the burden bearers of war and remember their loss. May we allow Christ to make his home in us so that we may become a sanctuary for the burdened and companion them in their restoration.