

A Time For Everything
Ecclesiastes Ch 3 v 8b

November is often thought of as a month of remembrance. For some it is a sad time as they remember loved ones who they no longer see and, of course, Remembrance Sunday encourages the nation as a whole to remember all those who have lost their lives in wars worldwide. A whole tourist industry has grown up around visits to Belgium, France and other places that have war graves on a grand scale. Visiting these places can be extremely emotional for those who choose to trace their family history back through time to discover where their ancestors lay.

Hearing the words 'War and Peace' used in the same sentence makes me think of Tolstoy's great novel 'War and Peace', set with a backdrop of Napoleon's invasion of Russia in 1812. It is quite a heavy read but television and radio dramatisations make it more accessible. As its title suggests, without war there is no peace and we know that life is full of contradictions. The book focuses on the spirituality of the main characters and their family happiness as the ultimate reward for spiritual suffering. I like a happy ending!! War - is there no end to war? Peace – do we ever experience true peace?

Does the writer of Ecclesiastes really mean that there is a time for war? War, with all its devastation, hatred and heartache seems to have no place in God's loving and caring world. We see time and time again that wars are the culmination of power, of greed and of selfishness. These are manmade wars. Yet there may be a time when we have to stand up for what we know to be right and just. When we see things going on that are hurtful and unjust – that are deceitful and spiteful. Is that a time to start a war, small though it may be, to fight against allowing things to happen that go against our beliefs? Perhaps we have wars going on within ourselves right now - battles between what we want to do and what we know God would not want us to do.

Peace! The Oxford Dictionary has several definitions of peace; cessation of war; freedom from civil disorder; quiet, tranquillity; friendliness, not at strife, keeping silent. Which definition do you prefer? Peace is not just the absence of war. God's peace is different from the world's peace. Isaiah Ch 57 v21 says 'There is no peace for the wicked'. Unless we put our trust entirely in God then we cannot have perfect peace. Jesus said 'Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you.' At the heart of the Christian message is that, through the life and death of Jesus, God gives people peace within themselves. There is a story about being a peacemaker in the Old Testament (1 Samuel Ch 25) and maybe that is one of our roles in life today – to be a peacemaker in our own communities or even in our own homes. No easy task! Hymn 553 in Mission Praise says:

'Peace I give to you; I give to you my peace
Let it flow to one another, let it flow let it flow'.

Let us not forget that 'everything happens at a time God chooses' and that with hind sight we will see the wisdom of our Lord.

For Discussion

1. Do we think that war is ever justified?
2. How do we gain peace within ourselves?

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