

Remembrance Sunday. 13 November 2022.

Romans 8: 31-39. Micah 4: 1-5



First, I'm going to show you a picture. It's a metal fence. It's rather battered. You might say it has seen better days. But it has a history. It has seen days that, mercifully, many of us have never seen, when the reality of war on the streets of London was all around. I wonder if you can see that this battered old bit of railing once started life as something else. In the

Second World War about half a million metal stretchers were made. The metal construction meant they were strong and easy to clean. There is a kink in the pole at both ends which formed feet so that they could be put down on the ground without lying completely flat. They were used in the London Blitz to carry people to safety from the rubble that was all that was left of bombed buildings. They may even have been used here in Beckenham when the bombs were falling.

After the war, they were re-purposed into railings for many of the London housing estates.

It is both a grim reminder of war on our doorstep, and a cause for thanks, that this country came through that terrible time and all those stretchers became redundant and could be used for more peaceful, if mundane, uses, like railings.

From the bombsites of London, our city was rebuilt and we moved from rubble to restoration.

Remembrance Sunday can be a hard day. It's a day for sharing the pain of those who grieve, for standing with those whose lives have been changed forever by wars in the past, or whose pain is a present reality. It's a day for hearing the memories of those who lived through war and want to tell their stories.

It's also hard because it makes us stop and think. As we look around the world we can't help thinking "will things ever be any different?"

Every year there seems to be another conflict somewhere, and this year is no different, with the war in Ukraine.

We yearn for something better, when the endless cycle of war will end and justice will finally be done.

Despite human ingenuity, diplomacy, intelligence, and all the ways we may have advanced since the prophet Micah's day, we are no further forward in finding a solution to the problem of conflict. We haven't cracked it yet!

The book of Micah is only 7 chapters long. It veers back and forth between words of judgement and promises of salvation in a way that makes working out any kind of timeframe almost impossible. But the context is that there was conflict within the nation of Israel as well as with neighbouring nations, and all because they had moved away from God.

There are dire warnings of the consequences of this: God's anger, exile, destruction, but ultimately there is hope because of God's mercy.

His prophecy looks forward to "the last days" (an unspecified time in the future) when, in searching for a solution, people from *all nations* will repent and turn to the

God of Israel, to learn to walk in his paths. God will mete out justice among the nations, because only he knows the rights and wrongs of every situation, and nations will no longer take up the sword against each other. In this new kingdom, because that is surely what Micah is describing, there is peace. It is a peace that is more than just the absence of war. From the rubble of war there will be true restoration. Weapons of war will simply not be needed and can be fashioned into something more useful. Like stretchers being made into railings, swords and spears will be made into tools with which to tend the earth, to farm, to grow food, grapes and figs. "Every man will sit under his own vine and fig tree." This is a picture of peace with God, peace between people, and peace with the land. There is a new contentment, and lack of fear, a sense that this is how God wants it to be: the kind of kingdom that Jesus asks us to pray for when he taught his followers; "your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven". This is the kingdom where God is sovereign. And there is reassurance that this is not just an idle daydream, because, Micah says, "the LORD Almighty has spoken". It's a promise.

This is God's vision for the world.

That is why he sent Jesus as the peacemaker between us and God, to offer himself for the sin of the world. Through the death and resurrection of Jesus, God offers the hope of restoration from the rubble of human lives.

But there is still a battle going on, which St Paul spoke about when he said

"our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms." (Ephesians 6: 12)

We don't have to look very far to find evil in the world today.

Our job is to hold on to our Christian hope even amid the continuing pain and suffering of the world. "All my hope on God is founded" as we shall be singing later in our service.

So today is a day for remembering, for sharing the pain of those who suffer, for praying for healing, and for catching God's vision for the world.

It requires our commitment to that vision of peace. We have to say, just as those in Micah's prophecy said: "All the nations may walk in the name of their gods, we will walk in the name of the LORD our God for ever and ever." In other words, no matter what anyone else is doing, despite the fact that there is still evil in the world, we are going to hold fast to the God of mercy, revealed to us in Jesus Christ.

Because we are convinced, as Paul was, that those powers of evil will never have the final word.

Suffering cannot separate us from God or from his love which we find perfectly expressed in Jesus. That is our comfort and our confidence. It is a truth that even robs death of its power.

For as Paul says: "I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Today, of all days, let us share that conviction.