

Pilgrim Uniting Church
As I See It - Rev. Allan Thompson

Anzac Day for Christians

One of the ironies in my life is the fact that I have ended up with a son and also a son in law who are serving members of the defence forces. The career choice of my elder son was rather different from what his father would have recommended! [He is now a Colonel in the Australian Army.] Then, when my daughter chose her life partner she married a RAAF person. So this minister-father who leans towards a pacifist outlook finds himself with two close relatives in the defence forces. I've had to think through my position – especially when my son was serving overseas in Iraq or East Timor.

Along with many Christians I sometimes struggle to get excited about Anzac Day commemorations. It is not that these Christians are ungrateful for the sacrifices made by soldiers, sailors and airmen in times of war, but rather that it is hard to reconcile war with the teachings of Jesus. The one whom we follow:

- refused to take up arms to fight the enemy;
- called us to love our enemies and to pray for those who persecute us;
- taught us to turn the other cheek;
- encouraged forgiveness (seventy times seven);
- proclaimed God's love to all people;
- gave us a gospel of reconciliation.

When the enemies of Jesus came against him with military force he did not resort to violence to defend himself or his cause. Rather, his example and his teachings point overwhelmingly towards a renunciation of armed conflict.

So, come Anzac Day what do Christians do? I have come to the conclusion that we can honour the fallen and acknowledge their sacrifice without having to support the system that sacrificed them. I want to show my gratitude for those who suffered so much for the sake of their country, but I do not want to honour war as the only or best way to resolve differences between nations or within nations. I once heard General Peter Cosgrove say on TV that "by any analysis war is an extremely stupid way of doing things". Now Cosgrove is not a pacifist but his words point to the fact that we can simultaneously honour the memory of those who have been sacrificed in war and actively seek different ways of ensuring that good prevails over evil, justice prevails over oppression, life prevails over death, and hope prevails over despair.

Especially when Anzac Day falls on a Sunday – and during the liturgical season of Easter (resurrection) – we must ensure that our Anzac Day commemorations take us beyond remembering past suffering and into a future of peace and hope.

Allan would be more than happy to chat about the above article with anyone who wants to.

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