

Remembrance Day, Unitarian Universalist Church of Olinda, Sunday November 6<sup>th</sup>, 2016  
Interim Minister the Rev. Fran Dearman

Readings and Hymns used at this service included:

#578 “This Great Lesson”, words of Olympia Brown: “We can never make the world safe by fighting. Every nation must learn that the people of all nations are children of God, and must share the wealth of the world. You may say this is impracticable, far away, can never be accomplished, but it is the work we are appointed to do. Sometime, somehow, somewhere, we must ever teach this great lesson.”

Responsive Reading #579 “The Limits of Tyrants”, words of Frederick Douglass: “Those who profess to favor freedom, and yet deprecate agitation, are people who want crops without plowing up the ground. . . . Power concedes nothing without a demand. . . . Find out what people will submit to, and you have found out the exact amount of injustice which will be imposed upon them. The limits of tyrants are prescribed by the endurance of those whom they oppress.”

Hymn #348, “Guide My Feet”

The Story for All Ages was Glen Mitchell’s “A Bad Penny Always Comes Back”, 2006. Also see the Wikipedia article on Operation Manna, the food relief flights into Netherlands of 1945.

The Invitation to Meditation was #589 *Peace, words of Pupils of the Lincoln School, adapted*  
“Peace means the beginning of a new world. It means that nations are friends; It means joy to the world. Peace is quiet and calm; it is rest; It is silence after a storm. . . .It is like sweet music after harsh sounds.”

Hymn #86 Blessed Spirit of My Life

The Offering was invited with #602, words of Lao-Tse: “If there is to be peace in the world, there must be peace in the nations. If there is to be peace in the nations, there must be peace in the cities. If there is to be peace in the cities, there must be peace between neighbours. If there is to be peace between neighbours there must be peace in the home. If there is to be peace in the home, there must be peace in the heart.”

The service included readings from “The Journal of Private Fraser, 1914-1918, Canadian Expeditionary Force”, words of Donald Fraser, ed. Reginald H. Roy. 1985

*SERMON: Remembrance Day*

*Interim Minister the Rev. Fran Dearman*

Some fifty years ago I was an air cadet. We paraded once a week on the concrete deck of the cavernous Bay Street Armouries in Victoria. Circling the yawning void above us was a mezzanine. And at the east end of the mezzanine, outside the quarters of the Canadian Scottish regiment, in a glass case, was a white wooden cross, wreathed in red poppies, muddied with earth, and under the cross was a sign, that the cross had been brought from the fields of Flanders. And each time we walked past this battered cross, we saluted, and turned our eyes towards it.

For the Canadian Scottish regiment, war had a face: absent friends and fallen comrades. For me as a teenager, there was the knowledge that war had a price. As the years passed, I learned more about that price.

Poets wrote unforgettably of the horror and the pity of it. Historians freighted volumes into single words: Vimy, Paschendaele, the Somme, Ypres; Dieppe, Sicily. Uncles who had been there filled in the gaps, slowly, over time. One of my English uncles had helped liberate a concentration camp. The horror of it was literally unspeakable for him; it was decades before he could say the words.

Neighbours, and the fathers of friends, like my own father, all had a story, though they seldom spoke it. Few families had been untouched by war, one way or another: ordinary people doing extraordinary things. One friend’s father had been with the Winnipeg Rifles at Hong Kong. He had endured years of imprisonment on forced labor gangs. He came home, married the widow of a comrade who had died in his arms, and spent the rest of his life wondering why he had survived when so many good people had not.

Growing up in Victoria, during the war in Viet Nam, we met with deserters and draft dodgers and conscientious objectors. There is a price to be paid for conscience also.

Always I carry in my mind the poem by ee cummings, an American Unitarian imprisoned in France as a conscientious objector during the First World War.

cummings wrote a poem valorizing the prisoner of conscience, a poem every bit as heroic as the poems that had valorized an obsolete chivalry. Perhaps you know his poem: "I sing of Olaf glad and big/whose warmest heart recoiled at war, a conscientious objector." The poet goes on to describe the beatings and torture that impotent rage vents upon those who challenge it, and Olaf's death in prison.

The poet concludes: "Christ (of his mercy infinite)/I pray to see, and Olaf too/ Preponderatingly because unless statistics lie he was more brave than me more blond than you....."

Always I carry in my mind the words of another poet, William Shakespeare, who wrote:

"I am afeared there are few who die well that die in a battle; for how can they charitably dispose of any thing when blood is in their argument? Now if these men do not die well, it will be a black matter for the king that led them to it.....(Henry V, Act 4, Scene 1)

To sing of Olaf, to sing of conscience wrestling with civil authority, reminds me also of two cherished interfaith colleagues in Alaska. One is the Mennonite pastor there, to whom I might refer a conscientious youth as the age of draft registration approaches. Another is a chaplain who volunteers with the Alaska National Guard. He served a year of deployment to Iraq, and another to Afghanistan. Each of these two fine men sees himself as trying to do the right thing. Each, in his own way, as best he can, is living the values he hopes will lead to lasting peace. I think also of a congregant at the Anchorage Fellowship. He is a United States Air Force nurse. He is a wounds specialist. He keeps busy these days.

Unitarians have never been of one mind on pacifism and military service. We have not been of one mind, we are not now, nor are we likely to be. For five hundred years Unitarians have debated: what is due to conscience, and what to Caesar? Some of us espouse unlimited pacifism; are we not the ones who give our bodies as the weapons for the war? If we do not cease from deeds of blood, how will war cease? On the other hand, some of us feel we can identify the criteria for a just war: Are we to stand by and watch when a Hitler burns down the house or a génocidaire butchers his neighbor?

A classic example of our divergence of opinion arose during the first world war, in 1917, at the General Conference of Unitarians. The conference was held that year in Montreal. The United States was on the eve of entering the conflict in Europe. Canada was already at war, and had been for several years. The casualty rate was horrific.

The presiding officer at the Montreal conference was William Howard Taft, former president of the United States and cradle Unitarian. Taft called on the assembly to support the war effort. Opposing Taft's resolution was John Haynes Holmes, one of the most eloquent and esteemed preachers of his generation. Former United States President Taft urged that Unitarians affirm "the righteousness of the war and the necessity for our winning it in the interest of the peace of the world". Speaking in opposition to Taft's resolution, stalwart pacifist Holmes lifted up the heart-breaking costs of this war, of any war. He decried the seeming endless enthusiasm for an endless war: "the fight goes on with a determination as wonderful as its cost is frightful". "What is civilization that it avails nothing at this hour? What is religion that it is impotent to still the devouring passions now raging throughout the world?" Taft argued that the way to peace was to win the war; Resolved, he proposed, "that it is the sense of this Unitarian conference that this war must be carried on to a successful issue to stamp out militarism in the world". The 1917 Unitarian conference adopted Taft's resolution, approving the United States entry into World War One, by a vote of 236 – 9. Holmes left the denomination over the issue, resigning his ministerial fellowship. He offered his resignation to his home church. The congregation refused to accept it; they kept Holmes in their pulpit for another forty years. But more than one Unitarian preacher did lose his pulpit for preaching pacifism. And more than one Unitarian preacher did

leave his pulpit to serve as a military chaplain.

We are not of one mind on this matter of just war, or just pacifism. Nor are we likely to be. We are not agreed on the means to peace. I hope we are agreed, however, that peace and justice are the goal. I hope we are agreed in respect for those who make a commitment, live their values, endure the burdens and pay the price.

Memory is part of what makes us human. Let us be mindful, this day, of every man, woman, and child who has suffered in war. Let us be mindful of every person who has walked the path to peace and justice, as best they can see the way. Let us hold in respect and compassion every man and woman who ever took an oath, and took the risk, and paid the price.

When our people return from whence we sent them, shattered in body or shaken in mind, or sound and whole and filled with hope, or somewhere in between, let us respect their experience. Their eyes have seen what ours have not.

Where is hope in this? Purpose is hope. Commitment to purpose is hope. I wish I could conclude by telling you that there would be no more war, ever again. I wish I could tell you that the United Nations Millennium Goals to end world poverty had been achieved, and so some causes of war removed. I wish I could tell you that the Geneva Conventions regarding the conduct of war were honoured in all lands and all nations under the sun. I cannot do that. Not yet.

I can tell you that in 1988 the Nobel Prize was awarded to the United Nations Peacekeeping Forces. I can tell you that word came down very quickly from Ottawa that Canadian military personnel who had served on UN peacekeeping missions would be permitted to wear their UN headgear at Remembrance Day observations and ceremonies. I can tell you that every one of my several friends in uniform who had served on peacekeeping missions could immediately place their hands on their blue berets. That blue beret, the symbol of their service with the UN peacekeeping mission, was among the most precious of their possessions; they wore it with pride, and a deep humility.

I shall close with some words from another friend of many years, who writes: November eleventh is a dichotomy for me. My maternal Grandfather (Da) was a British infantryman in the first world war. He didn't talk about the war except for two things. He had asked Nana to marry him and she said he would get his answer when he returned from the battlefield. He took her engagement ring with him and he lost it somewhere in France. He would also talk about trying to get some rest in a foxhole when a great barrage started. He asked a mate what was happening (probably not in those precise words) and was told it was "just the bloody Canadians". Nov 11 is also my Birthday, writes my friend of many years. I would go down to Nana and Da's in the morning, we would listen to the radio broadcast from Ottawa, have our silence, and after the last post, my birthday would begin. In a way I think I was meant to be born on that day to give Da some good memories too.

Closing Hymn: #159 This is My Song

Closing Words: *Mark Belletini, #686 Benediction*

Postlude #388 Dona Nobis Pacem

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