

Preached FCCW, November 11, 2018

(Veterans Day Sunday)

Isaiah 2:1-4

Hebrews 9:24-28

This morning we will mark Veterans Day by joining with houses of worship in many other communities by our participation in the Bells for Peace event.

Bells for Peace is a commemoration of the armistice that was signed 100 years ago this day, to bring the First World War to its conclusion.

World War I was billed as the War to End All Wars.

As we all know, all too well, it wasn't.

The Treaty of Versailles which brought an end to World War I, already bore within itself the seeds of discord that would eventually blossom into the toxic Nazi nationalism that, within mere decades, produced a Second World War.

Then, from the ruins of World War II emerged a new kind of war, the Cold War.

The Cold War spawned "hot" proxy wars in places like Korea and Viet Nam.

And shadow wars waged through intelligence and counter intelligence organizations.

All under an omnipresent threat of thermonuclear Mutual Assured Destruction.

Most recently the nature of warfare mutated yet again into the unconventional and global war between governments and terrorist organizations.

I'd like to read to you part of an actual letter written by the grandson of one of the many soldiers who fought valiantly in the War to End All Wars.

It's one that was posted on the Bells for Peace website.

"My grandfather, William Anderson, a South Carolina native, was a real American War Hero.

He was a quiet and warm man, a jack-of-all-trades born in the late 1800s, and he lived a humble life in Asheville, North Carolina.

He was part of an all-black regiment that fought with French soldiers against the Germans during World War I.

When my mother would take me and my sisters to visit him, he would frequently show us his medal that he had tucked away in an old tarnished tin box.

The medal, shaped like an Iron Cross backed by crossed swords, was marred with time; and it had an aged green and red ribbon attached.

My grandfather would beam with pride every time he displayed the medal, but as little kids we didn't fully understand the significance of his pride.

Apparently, he wanted his grandchildren and great-grandchildren to know what he'd done--and to be proud of him.

Many years later, I discovered that Grandfather Anderson's efforts on the battlefield earned him a coveted French medal, the Cross of War, for bravery in combat action.

That's the same honor given Audie Murphy, the most decorated American combat soldier of World War II."

"My mother sent me a copy of the newspaper article about Granddaddy's valor while I was serving in the United States Air Force in the 1970s.

It inspired me to make the military a career, and I retired after nearly 23 years of service.

My wife and I are proud to be part of families with a tradition of military service.

My father and my wife's father served in the Army during World War II; my wife, her brother Knoxie, and I served during the Vietnam War, and our son Torey is a veteran who served during Operation Enduring Freedom in the Middle East.

We are honored to be part of Granddaddy's military legacy."

There are two things we might gather from this letter.

The first is the determination of William Anderson to fight for the cause of freedom, even though as a black man born in the reluctantly receding shadow of slavery and growing up under the Law of Jim Crow, he had never personally enjoyed many of the freedoms he went to war to defend.

Perhaps what motivated him was the hope that though what he was fighting for was something that up til then remained an unfulfilled dream, by his service he might one day see come to pass.

That it could actually be true that this would be the War to End All Wars.

Maybe even the War to End All injustices and Inequalities.

And how his example inspired future generations of his family to proudly follow the path he modeled.

Which leads to the second thing this letter has to tell us.

That after the War to End All Wars, there were in fact, still more wars to fight in William Anderson's children's and their children's

and their children's children's lifetimes.

Looking back, the title, "War to End All Wars" reflects a noble aspiration for the future of humanity.

Perhaps, taken straight out of Isaiah's prophecy of a day when,

they shall beat their swords into plowshares,

and their spears into pruning hooks;

nation shall not lift up sword against nation,

neither shall they learn war any more.

At the same time, hope in a War to End All Wars also smacks of a kind of naivete.

An overoptimistic assessment of humanity's capacity to exorcise the demons of history's pattern of perpetual conflict,

through one decisive and conclusive confrontation.

As Albert Einstein wisely observed, "We cannot solve our problems with the same level of thinking that created them."

I knew an old man named Bud who was a veteran of the Second World War.

Unlike many veterans I've known, Bud could talk for hours about his combat experiences.

He served in the Army Corps of Engineers and so was sometimes called to be part of the forward force responsible for preparing the way for units behind them to advance.

I remember him telling me of dangerous missions,

like ferrying soldiers across a river under cover of darkness and under the noses of German patrols on the opposite riverbank.

It was that sort of mission that positioned Bud's outfit to be among the first to come upon a concentration camp that had been abandoned by the German guards,

who had fled in the face of advancing Allied forces.

What was left behind in that camp were the emaciated prisoners who had survived long enough to be rescued.

And the grim evidence of those who had not.

In the course of his brutal March to the Sea during the American Civil War,

General Sherman of the Union Army, declared that “War is hell.”

At the same time, he reasoned that the institution of human slavery,

which the enemy was prepared to fight to the death to defend,

represented an even greater hell,

that nothing short of war seemed capable of eradicating.

That’s the paradox of war, isn’t it?

Humanity dreams of divesting itself of wars and warfare,

yet humanity itself generates *inhumanities* on a scale for which

only warfare seems to offer a reasonable solution for setting things right.

It would seem that nothing short of an act of divine intervention could ever break that cycle.

The fact is, the one true War to End All Wars was not fought in Europe, or the Pacific.

It was not fought in jungles, deserts, skies or seas.

It was not fought with fleets, squadrons or battalions.

It was fought on a lonely cross outside of Jerusalem and its victory was sealed at an empty tomb.

And its echoes are fought to this day, in every human heart.

The odd thing about this victory is that it only becomes a reality by surrendering;

beginning with surrendering the fruitless cycle of human efforts and failures to establish peace on our ill fated terms,

so that we can accept Jesus’ sacrifice of himself once and for all.

The supreme sacrifice that begets a transformation of human nature from the inside out;

and without which genuine and everlasting peace can never be possible.

Because, it is only when the *power of love inside us*,

exceeds the *love of power within us*,

that peace such as Isaiah envisioned will become a reality instead of a dream.

And, only then can we truly declare that the War to End All Wars has really been won.