

At the eleventh hour of the eleventh day of the eleventh month in 1918, the armistice was signed to end the World War I. In many countries people will observe two minutes of silence at 11 am. One remembrance will be at the Cenotaph. We may hear the noise from the guns and we'd like to be part of that

While November 11 is observed in both New Zealand and Australia, greater significance is given to ANZAC Day (April 25) which in our secular society is about the only community religious festival left.

Other days dedicated to remembering the horrors of war and praying for peace include the second Sunday before Advent which is the day Germany remembers its war dead, International Peace Day, Hiroshima Day and Yom Hashoah (remembrance of the Holocaust). The number and variety of such days serve as reminders that we've been doing this war thing for a long, long time. In the second book of Samuel we read:

'In the spring, at the time when kings go off to war, David sent Joab out with the king's men and the whole Israelite army. They destroyed the Ammonites and besieged Rabbah.' (2 Samuel 11:1)

It's a sad indictment on fallen humanity that we resort to war so often and the 20th century seems to have been one of the worst. Not that the 21st century is looking a whole lot better.

November 11 started off being called Armistice Day. The first official Armistice Day events were therefore held in the grounds of Buckingham Palace on the morning of 11 November 1919. This would set the trend for a day of Remembrance for time to come (so far). I'm not sure the major British events are held in the Buckingham Palace grounds today but I haven't checked that out, nor whether they changed the guard that day.

Now it's called Remembrance Day.

It's been quite a week for New Zealand as the final conflict of World War I involving New Zealand has been remembered when they liberated the French community of Le Quesnoy (Keen-Waa). Recently I read an interview with Colin Averill who has co-authored a book about his father, Leslie Averill, the first soldier up the 8 metre ladder which led to Kiwi soldiers liberating Le Quesnoy. Today there's a street and a school named after Leslie Averill, who returned to Christchurch where he had a long and purposeful career as an Obstetrician and the other word that goes with that.

This week is about remembering World War I and the 100th anniversary of the Armistice.

We gather to remember and to mark a season in the story of our nation and to think about those whose lives were dramatically shortened or altered beyond description. And we always live in hope that wars will cease and men and women truly live in peace.

What are your connections with World War I – who has someone in their family tree who as far as you know was part of World War I?

There are 4000 crosses around the cenotaph and that represents nearly a quarter of all the soldiers from New Zealand killed in World War I. There wasn't a community, a church and hardly any family who wasn't profoundly affected by that war but more of that later. Did you know that 48 young men from First Church were killed in World War I? Did you hear about the Otago mother whose four sons were killed in WWI?

Whenever I think of Remembrance Day I nearly always think of Wilfred Owen.

Wilfred Owen was an English poet and soldier. His shockingly realistic poetry on the horrors of both trench and gas warfare stood in stark contrast to how the public saw the war and to the confidently patriotic poetry written in the early years. In our day we'd say he told it like it was.

Owen was killed in action on the 4th of November 1918, exactly one week (almost to the hour) before the signing of the Armistice and in one of those peculiar quirks of history he was promoted to the rank of Lieutenant the day after his death. His mother received the telegram informing her of his death on Armistice Day, at the very time the church bells were ringing out in celebration.

So as long as I have the memory to do this, I'll always associate Remembrance Day with Wilfred Owen and his family.

As we remember today we join with people in our city and in thousands of places across the world to honour those who served and died; and to pray never again!

This morning we've planned a range of inputs to get us to think about the awfulness of war and the amazing courage that emerges.

Christmas 1915 – clip sent to the Data Projector – Celtic Thunder

Victoria Cross story – Mike

2 minutes silence at 11:00

Poem - Remembrance Day – Mike South

Flanders Field – read by Leonard Cohen

THE UNFORESEEN CONSEQUENCES OF WAR

Just before we read Scriptures of hope and conclude this day of remembering I'd like to reflect for a few moments on what I've called the unforeseen consequences of war. This list isn't complete and it's really the result of thinking about today for some time and also from watching the film 'Three Billboards outside Ebbing, Missouri.' I don't think the main actress had any idea where her actions would lead.

Just to mention a few:

1. Soldiers who came back emotional and mental wrecks. We didn't know about post-traumatic stress disorder then. Their lives would never be the same and I should imagine more than a few women stood by helplessly as they watched their men dissemble.
2. The alcoholism and nicotine addictions that come out of war, all wars actually. I think about our kids' grandfathers whose lives were cut off largely because of the addictive power of cigarettes.
3. The thousands who were never able to marry because 16-20 000 thousand men were buried in some foreign field. And that when the population of NZ was around 1 million. That would be somewhere between 80-100 000 in today's terms.
4. Unresolved grief in families and communities
5. Children never meeting their fathers, never knowing their fathers.
6. Domestic violence
7. Spiritual death. After the end of World War II in particular there wasn't great relief and rejoicing only. It was tough, maybe not as tough as today.

However there are also the unforeseen consequences of war seen in another light entirely – the comradeship and mateship; the sense of community; the courage under fire and bravery beyond what would be expected – Mike alluded to this earlier. And the willingness to sacrifice for what was perceived to be the greater good. I have to accept too that for some men given the bleak and unfulfilled lives they lived – the war was the best thing that ever happened to them.

On balance however, war is a great evil and most wars are fought on behalf of political leaders and arms manufacturers, such is the sickness of our world. Which will only be put wright when the King of Kings, the Lord of Lords and the Prince of Peace rules.

In the meantime let's take hope from Isaiah's prophecy that's also in Micah. Remember it comes out of Israel's experience, not ours. I've chosen to read this from the Message today because I'm reading it, not preaching from it.

SLIDES 6-7: Isaiah 2:1-5

The Message Isaiah got regarding Judah and Jerusalem:

There's a day coming

**when the mountain of God's House
will be The Mountain—**

solid, towering over all mountains.

**All nations will river toward it,
people from all over set out for it.**

**They'll say, "Come,
let's climb God's Mountain,
go to the House of the God of Jacob.**

**He'll show us the way he works
so we can live the way we're made."**

Zion's the source of the revelation.

God's Message comes from Jerusalem.

He'll settle things fairly between nations.

He'll make things right between many peoples.

**They'll turn their swords into shovels,
their spears into hoes.**

**No more will nation fight nation;
they won't play war anymore.**

**Come, family of Jacob,
let's live in the light of God.**

Prayer

God of Nations