

Sunday 6 August, 2017

*A sermon preached by the Dean, the Very Revd Dr Andreas Loewe
at the Hiroshima Peace Day service.*

I have not visited Japan yet, so I have not had the chance to walk among the memorials of the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Park. At the heart of the city of Hiroshima, it combines the ruins of buildings left standing after the gruesome nuclear attack on the city 72 years ago with, a public park that serves as a memorial urging us later generations to prevent the devastation of future war. The Memorial Park takes up a site about as large as our own Shrine of Remembrance, and, like Melbourne's Shrine, is an integral part of Hiroshima's city centre. Like our Shrine it, too, has a formal cenotaph, individual memorials and museums that invite its visitors to let themselves be challenged by the horror of war. Living signs of remembrance are added to Hiroshima's large-scale memorial: a large pool of water and flowers are signs of hope. Tonight paper lanterns like the ones we see here in our Cathedral will be lit and launched into the pond of peace as living signs of remembrance. The reminder of the past and its destructive horrors are intended as a visible sign for us to make a firm and lasting commitment for peace.

This Cathedral, too, serves as a memorial to past conflicts, though on a lesser scale than either the Peace Park in Hiroshima or the extensive gardens of our own Shrine of Remembrance. Dotted around the walls of our nave are memorial plaques that honour generations of those who left from Australia to engage in conflicts overseas: a cross from the Somme, once marking the tomb of a serviceman in the first World War, tablets recalling those who lost lives in Korea, Vietnam, or at sea aboard a battle cruiser that carried the nation's name. Tablets to remember Cathedral choristers who died in battle and Cathedral canons who led the evacuation of Gallipoli. As we meet to pray each day we are surrounded by the past and its wounds. Our building may not carry these wounds in stone – as do other Cathedrals and churches such as Coventry or Dresden's Frauenkirche, where the charred stones remind worshippers of the destruction of aerial bombardment and the fires that devastated these great cities – but we too are enveloped by memorials of conflict and war, invited to pause and pray, and to commit to work for peace.

The reason why we call the memorials of the conflicts that have scarred a nation's soul a 'Shrine' is surely this: to engender a response that is akin to that of what we do Sunday by Sunday here in church: contrition as we recall the sins that led to conflict and war, remembrance of the heroic deeds of the past, proclamation of the actions of salvation, assurance of a belief in a future that is better than the past, prayer for that future to come. Much of what makes up the 'ministry of the word' in this Cathedral is what the architects of our Shrines of Remembrance, our Cenotaphs and Peace Parks had in mind when they set out to create spaces for the solemn recollection of something so much larger than the individual names that are carved in stone. Spaces to remember actions much greater than the places of destruction themselves, whether they were changed in minutes (like Hiroshima and Dresden) or slowly, painfully over months (like the villages of the Somme), spaces to remember the battlefield and arenas of conflict. Spaces to commemorate conflicts greater than a single campaign or war, however destructive, however devastating they were. These spaces urge us to make a response of commitment: the 'Let all the souls

here rest in peace; we shall not repeat this evil' of Hiroshima, the 'Father forgive' of Coventry, the 'Never again war, resist those who seek evil' of Dresden. The memorials across our aisles, across our city, across this world share the same purpose: they are silent witnesses to make us recall, make us repent, make us commit to working for better, brighter futures.

What distinguishes our worship here at St Paul's from the silent witnesses – plaques, tablets, cenotaphs – in our building, our city and across the world, is that our Christian worship takes passive remembrance and the internal change of heart and moves it into action. The Eucharist takes the solemn recollection of a deadly event of the past, Christ's death on a cross outside the city of Jerusalem, almost 2,000 years ago, into the living presence of our community. We bring bread to a common table to remember Jesus and break that bread in solemn commemoration to recall his body broken on a cross. We carry wine to the table to remember the blood Jesus shed on the cross, and we share that drink together as a sign that all who drink are given the pledge that their sins have been washed away in the blood of the cross. We give our own gifts of money, of service, of love, to enable the sharing of these living signs and to enable the continued proclamation for future generations of Christ's heroic deeds of the past, his work of salvation on Calvary, and the assurance of a better future, a greater kingdom than those structures of power we can desire or imagine. The worship we here day by day transform the markers of the deeds of the past – whether heroic, tragic, devastating or selfless – into living signs of lived-out action. When we break the bread of the Eucharist we delve deeply into the events of the past and when we share it in faith we let ourselves be transformed in a way that our gazing, our meditating on memorials, however reverently, however meaningfully, can never accomplish.

I wonder whether that is why Peter seeks to commemorate the extraordinary act of transformation of his teacher and friend by setting up a memorial to mark the event. Jesus had taken his three closest friends to a place 'apart by themselves'. There, on the top of a mountain, all alone, Jesus is transfigured before them: he was transfused with a light not seen before on earth until he became whiter than white, lighter than light. Two heroes of old, Elijah, the prophet who did not see death but was taken to God in a whirlwind, and Moses, the lawgiver who liberated God's people from slavery, are seen talking with Jesus. The three friends were terrified. Peter speaks for all three, when he says: 'It is good to be here, let us make three memorials'. And the gospel writer adds a note of explanation and censure: 'he did not know what to say'. Setting up memorials to recollect the extraordinary events of the past is what we do when terrified and overwhelmed. The places of memory *are* moving, because of the extraordinary nature of the deeds recalled. But the gospel writer suggests that this is not the only response we can make. Peter never did set up the three steles to remember the extraordinary moment when the light of heaven shone on earth and the heroes of faith talked with their teacher. Events simply overtook him: they too were enveloped in the cloud of light and heard the divine voice reveal their rabbi and teacher as the Son of God and Saviour of All: 'This is my Son, the beloved; listen to him', God spoke. The light of resurrection shone through Jesus, prefiguring what he had told them: that he would be raised to a life that would be forever.

The key to that new life, however, Jesus warned, would be his abject suffering. Jesus told his friends that he would need to 'undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again'. The light of transfiguration was given to the three friends as a sign of the glory of life restored Christ promised. At the same time the three heard that the way to that glory would be through suffering and the death of the transfigured one. And that the way to remember the transfiguring light of Christ, the way to the dawn of Easter Day could only be forged by suffering with Christ through the darkness of Good Friday. When we come together day by day, we recall both the darkness and the light: we break bread to remember a tortured broken body; we drink wine to recall the innocent blood shed on our behalf. We remember the devastating loss, the needless suffering, the darkness of death exemplified in one person: Jesus Christ. But we do not stop there: we do not just gaze and remember, and hope for a better future. We are moved to action, and service to work for that future. The reason why the disciples did not create a memorial to the transfiguration is because they knew that, if they stayed close to Jesus, they would live out the transfiguration, would share his transforming love and light.

And we are called to do the same: our world will remain a dark place if we only ever pause and remember and do not work for peace and justice. The world will continue to be a dangerous place, with greater threats to humankind and greater powers of devastation than those we recollect today, if we only ever observe silence, mourn the losses and mark the heroism of past ages. The observances of the past are important – that is why we engage in the same kind of remembrance in the first half of every Eucharist. But unless we move from observance to action, from remembering to sharing signs of peace, from intention and hope to lived out service, from the place of celebration to the world, our remembrance will be short-lived and ineffectual. The transforming light of Christ will only shine forth from us and through us when we put into practise Christ's teaching and live in our lives the fruit of his redemption. At the end of each service we are sent out, to 'go in peace: to love and serve the Lord'. Having shared Christ's peace, having received the meal of peace, we are at peace, ready to serve others, and to make known that peace we have been given in acts of loving care and dedication: in our welcome of others, in our love for those entrusted to our care and our love of those we may find hard to love, in our outreach to the lonely, the poor and the broken, we are sent to share the transfiguring light, the transforming love of Christ with the world. It is my prayer for us that we might become living memorials of the love of God: sharing this love with the world so that the world may be saved.

'Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever. Amen.'