Bennochy church 13th November 2016

The need for remembrance has never been stronger. The great wars cast their shadow of loss upon us all, not just across recent history, but across what is happening in the world today in places like Mosel in Iraq and in Syria, and no doubt, will cast their shadow well into the future. It raises the question as to whether war is evitable, as the means by which we as humankind, solve our differences.

I think it was only right and proper that those who represented their countries on Friday nights Scotland England football match at Wembley, had the opportunity of wearing the black armband with a poppy on it, as a mark of respect to those who represented their countries, in times of war.

The poppy is associated with the fields of Flanders and the men 'who went over the top' and who never returned. Their colour, a vivid red, standing in fields of death, a reminder of the ultimate sacrifice. For others, their memory is defending the skies in the battle of Britain or landing on the beaches of Normandy and for people at home, often under siege; they remember the devastation of places like Clydebank, Coventry and London, to name just a few.

However people reflect today, they do so remembering family and friends who fought and died, or who suffered the trauma of injury to body, mind or spirit. If it is not our generation, then we at least remember with respect and give due honour to the fallen. The volunteers, the 'pals' battalions, a generation lost. The conscripts who fought to defend their families and their way of life. Those who did not take up arms, but who in so many ways, were part of the war effort, some served in the medical corp.; others the land army and the thousands of women who kept the factories running.

Micah was active in Judah, the southern Kingdom of Israel, from before the fall of Samaria, the northern Kingdom in 722 BC. We are back in the 8th century BC. And he experienced the devastation, brought by Assyrian invasion of Judah in 701 BC. This is a man knows about the realities of war

To the people of Jerusalem he says, disputes among great nation will be settled. I have to be honest and say it does not feel like that to me. The middle East is in turmoil, many countries are ravaged by civil war and the relationship between Russia and the West is cooling.

It seems today that the sword is more important than the plough and we rush to grasp the spear, as we negotiate from a position of power. The words spoken, that nations will never again go to war, seem hollow. Does the writer no know human nature? We don't work like that! If we can grasp something we will. The battle to establish peace will be hard fought. It doesn't just happen. We will need to fight just as hard in the wars of

reconciliation, as many people today still seek to exert power, in acts of violence.

The words of Micah are a great ideal. Everyone will live in peace, safe in their land and no one will be afraid. The problem is, war is part of our nature and humanity is on the move, often because their home is not safe. It is a great ideal, but the Kingdom of God on earth will always have wars, not just because Jesus said that, but because we are human. A constant reminder that we need the forgiveness of God and a humility and respect towards others.

In what context as we to understand the words of the prophet, and they are important, because it we cannot understand them, how do we understand Jesus Christ, as the prince of peace?

"For to us a child is born,
to us a son is given,
and the government will be on his shoulders.
And he will be called
Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace." (Isaiah 9: 2)

One of the conundrums of faith is the idea that we are "in-betweeners". We believe the Kingdom of God is here, ushered in by Jesus Christ. Eternal life begins now, not in the future. But it is a Kingdom that has not yet been fulfilled. We live in a Kingdom of the 'here', with all its realities, good and bad, but it

is also a Kingdom of the 'not yet'. And that means we struggle between the ideals we seek to live up to and reality of the world round about us.

Micah is no different, he is giving us a prophecy of hope in the midst of his despair. His nation is falling apart, the enemy is at the gate, but that does not mean they have been abandoned by God. There will be a time, when God will once again usher in an era of peace. We live in the midst of that tension. Micah's words are a wished for reality, but it is not 'pie in the sky'. It is hope. It is faith in the future.

Advent is just around the corner. Jesus was born into a world of occupation, but he came as the prince of peace. That did not mean wars ended. Jesus recognised that. History tells us that. But a Kingdom based on faith, hope, justice and peace was born into a world of fear, injustice, hatred and war. All the tensions of reality and hope remain, but Jesus said, and lived the example, there is a new way for humanity to live.

We still live in the midst of that tension. War surrounds us, and it always will, but like Micah, we are asked to offer hope to the world, in the person of Jesus Christ. A window into a new world. A promise to come. A new reality, born in the struggle of today. A Kingdom that offers the ideal of peace, and not war. Spears turned to pruning knives and swords, hammered into ploughs. Amen.