Remembrance Sunday Thoughts

The book of Ecclesiastes (possibly written by Solomon, around 900 years BC) has this to say about life: *There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under the heavens: a time to be born and a time to die; a time to plant and a time to uproot; a time to kill and a time to heal; …….; a time for war and a time for peace.*

A couple of hundred years on, about 700 BC, Micah predicted terrible times of war for the people of Israel. But then he offers this amazing vision of peace in the world: *They will beat their swords into ploughshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not take up sword against nation, nor will they train for war anymore*

And around 500 BC, it was Confucius (we think) who said this: *If there is righteousness in the heart, there will be beauty in the character. If there is beauty in the character, there will be harmony in the home. If there is harmony in the home, there will be order in the nations. When there is order in the nations, there will peace in the world."*

But in their album recorded in 2000 (AD), the band U2 wrote and sang this: *"Heaven on earth - we need it now - I'm sick of all this hanging around - Sick of sorrow, Sick of pain - Sick of hearing again and again that there's gonna be peace on earth."* Peace (world peace – everywhere) - seems to be, in their words, "*a long time a-cummin*"….

On the one hand, Confucius seems to be saying in no uncertain terms – if we expect to enjoy peace on earth, it all starts with righteousness in the hearts of individuals – and that includes you and me. On the other hand, the U2 lyrics still haunt us – we've not cracked it yet.

Of course, ultimate peace and justice and joy will come only in and through the Kingdom of God. But that doesn't mean that we just sit and wait – it's never too soon to start cultivating an oasis of peace in the desert of our war mongering world. In the words of Mahatma Ghandi, *"Peace is not something that you wish for. It is something that you make, something that you do, something that you are, something that you give away."*

Even so these days it's also true to say that: there are some who would

argue that ‘taking up your cross’ means living a life of vulnerability, in the belief that “suffering love” is a more powerful weapon than bombs and guns; whilst there are others who might argue, just as cogently, that in a sinful world, we have to sometimes use the weapons of evil for the good-of-all (basically supporting the phrase “there’s a time for war, and a time for peace).

We’ll not resolve that issue here: all I would offer is this - when nations do choose take up arms, they should do so in sorrow not anger. And if there is such a thing as victory in war, there should be not only ‘rejoicing’ – but also regret that such a costly victory has been called for. Which its what we acknowledge annually, on November 11th.

In the light of continuing mindless and indiscriminate violence and terrorism (not just from traditionally-armed people, but by more subtle and immensely damaging cyber attacks and economic sanctions, too) God needs **us**; the world needs **us -** whenever we can, whenever we can, to transform ‘Mica’s’ swords into ploughshares and spears into pruning hooks’.

Thought for the Week: Micah’s vision has not yet be fully realised globally, but maybe that’s due, to some extent, to the fact that the message isn’t "out there” that everyone has a part to play in its fulfilment. We’re all called do what we can. Which begs the questions:

- Do we??
- If not, how can we??

And a clue to the answers, I believe, lies in these similarly-themed prayers for the day, and prayers for our times:

Living Lord help us to help you to fulfil Micah’s vision of transforming evil into good:

- ***When tempted to hate, may we practice love***
- ***When tempted to anger – may we practice forgiveness***
- ***When tempted to selfishness, may we learn to share***
- ***When tempted to give up, may we try learn to try harder***
- ***When tempted to despair, may we learn resolve***
- ***When tempted by weakness, give us strength for the day, and love to the last.***

_____

Lord, make me an instrument of your peace:
Where there is hatred, let me sow love;
Where there is injury, pardon;
Where there is doubt, faith;
Where there is despair, hope;
Where there is darkness, light;
Where there is sadness, joy.

O divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek
To be consoled as to console,
To be understood as to understand,
To be loved as to love;
For it is in giving that we receive;
It is in pardoning that we are pardoned;
It is in dying to self that we are born to eternal life.

- ***Blessed is he who loves and does not therefore desire to be loved;***
- ***blessed is he who fears and does not therefore desire to be feared;***
- ***blessed is he who serves and does not therefore desire to be served;***
- ***blessed is he who behaves well toward others and does not desire that others behave well toward him; and because these are great things, the foolish do not rise to them.***

Lord make each of us active and courageous instruments of your peace.