

### Finding hope for a world in a mess

In front of the United Nations stands a sculpture taken from this text it is of a sword being made into a ploughshare.

**The LORD will mediate between nations and will settle international disputes. They will hammer their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will no longer fight against nation, nor train for war anymore.**

It was at the end of WW1 that the two minutes of silence and the act of Remembrance were first instituted... lest we forget...

Today there are so many people and events to remember. Most of all, we remember those who made the supreme sacrifice in defending their country, who gave their lives for others so that we might live in freedom. The Scripture reminds that: "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends."

For these sacrifices we have a debt, of deep gratitude. We honor them today in this community service, here in Stratford.

We also remember that the first Word War was Horrific. Ten million soldiers were killed. 20 million were wounded. 1200 Indigenous soldiers were killed. 61,000 Canadians were killed. Their heroism is remembered across our country at cenotaphs and cemeteries. We remember with deep gratitude: Ypres, Vimy and Passchendaele. Cities, towns and countryside were wrecked. Animals and wildlife died. And ordinary people who were in harm's way, died.

In total, including civilians, 40 million people died. The war was fought with horses and over 8 million horses died with countless mules and donkeys.

It was said at that time that this war was the war to end all wars. A League of Nations was formed so that war would be no more. But that did not stop the next war which was only 21 years away.

The Second World War exceeded the totals of deaths from WW1 with 60 million people killed or 3% of the world's population. 44,000 Canadians were killed and 55,000 were wounded. We remember them today along with all those who have served Canada and the world, in Korea, Afghanistan and on Peace keeping missions around the world. We cannot be grateful enough for their courage, daring and their willingness to risk everything for their country and the freedom we enjoy.

I know that many of you are afraid of what is happening to our world. The consensus among many is that the world is in a mess.

Many of you have stopped listening to the news. It is just too depressing.

We are affected by the war in Ukraine, the war in Gaza and the Middle East Cauldron.

Then there is climate change. It took until early 1800 for the planet to reach its first 1 billion of human population. Now we add a billion every 12-15 years. Our impacts have been huge. Human driven climate change has produced in the last ten years, each year have been the hottest on record. The planet is warming faster than experts thought possible with resulting increased floods, tornadoes, ocean rise, hurricanes, forest fires, drought, crop damage and loss and storm surges inundating coastal areas. People are on the move because it keeps on happening when they lose everything...

10,000 years ago 99 percent of the planet was wild animals. Today it's 1%. 10,000 years ago we were 1%. Today we are 32% with 67% of the planet in livestock. Our population continues to grow. We are adding 80 million people a year. The more people there are, the harder it is to protect against pandemics. Getting vaccines in billions of people's arms is a logistical nightmare.

Refugees now are above 122.6 million coming primarily from 5 countries: Syria, Venezuela, Ukraine and Afghanistan- all ruled by dictatorships or wars started by dictatorships.

You ask me: "So David, where is the hope?"

The good news is that there are a lot of people across the world who get up everyday to try to make the world a better more peaceful place. For instance, get on the Net and have a look at all the people working on climate change. It's staggering!

Our veterans told us not to break faith with those who died or they would not sleep in Flanders fields.

The Great Generation came out of World War Two. They built schools, the United Nations, infrastructure and world institutions like Nato, which have made immense contributions to the world. They didn't break faith with those who died. People all across the world get up each morning to carry on the Great Generation's work today, because they remember with gratitude the sacrifices made for them.

Our vets returned to Stratford. I met many of them who are now gone. They built our churches, they volunteered at service clubs and they did not forget their comrades who died. They decided to do all they could to make a difference in this Community on behalf of those who made the supreme sacrifice.

We are in the midst of bloody conflicts once again. Where does the hope lie there?

I came across an article in The Beacon Herald some time ago, written by Gwynn Dyer. In it he stated that Democracies don't go to war with one another. Rather dictatorships start wars and then to preserve freedom democracies get involved to try to stop the aggression.

The hope then is to try to strengthen democracy and reform it where necessary.

In 1968 The Presbyterian church committed itself to be not only a reformed church, but an always reforming church 'Semper Reformanda' was the cry.

Today as The Ukrainian president has pointed out, the UN needs Reformation. It won't do for a member of the Security council to break UN resolutions with no penalty and use the veto more than any other nation, to get away with whatever it likes.

Democracies also need ongoing reformation. The opposition and the ruling parties need to assess legislation on the merits and strive to cooperate together. That would be meaningful reformation of Government in Canada and the US and in many democracies.

The Catholic Church needs reformation in order to better include women. There was once again recent failure to allow women to be deacons.

The American democracy needs to reform itself, getting rid of the filibuster and the partisan appointment of Court judges. Judges need to be appointed by a non partisan body, who assess skills based on their knowledge of the law and the Constitution. "Semper Reformanda" would improve the world for millions.

But the world being what it is, to every good action there is a dark attack reaction.

There is an interesting new film called The Apprentice. In that film is the playbook used by Trump when a young man, which he manifestly still

uses today without apology, because he has found that **immorality drives wild success**. Here's the playbook:

- 1) Attack, attack, attack!
- 2) Admit nothing. Deny everything.
- 3) "No matter what happens, no matter what they say about you, no matter how beaten you are, you claim victory and never admit defeat... You want to win, that's how you win."

The five countries that are creating the most refugees all are totalitarian. The countries that are causing wars are all totalitarian dictatorships.

When questioned they attack. They lie constantly and deny everything. They never admit that they are wrong. They stifle dissent and always claim victory when they are clearly defeated. Witness Trump's false claim with no evidence, that the American election was stolen or Putin's claim that he had no intention of invading Ukraine.

"As Russia amassed troops on the Ukrainian border, Russian President Vladimir Putin, his spokesman, Dmitry Peskov, and other Russian officials repeatedly denied that their country had plans to invade Ukraine. They blamed the U.S., Ukraine and others for the tension, insisting that Russia is a "peaceful country" and that it is "not going to attack anyone."

The playbook? **Deny, Deflect, Mislead**

This playbook was pursued by Hitler in a sophisticated democracy. It is used in Russia by Putin and Xi Jinping in China. Lies and denials are standard operating procedures. The truth is far away and is suppressed. The media needs to be controlled and is silenced, unless it is a propaganda machine also operating by the playbook.

So where is the hope? Jesus told us to be as wise as serpents and as harmless as doves. We must not break faith with those who died for

freedom. We need to fact check, we need freedom of the press, we need to value the truth.

As Solzhenitsyn once wrote: "The simple step of a courageous individual is not to take part in the lie. "One word of truth outweighs the world." Jesus said: "The truth shall set you free."

If we are to be faithful to those who died and those who continue to die, we must educate our young and we must teach that morality, truth telling, compassion and love are the way forward.

I have always believed that confusion was a bad thing. But there is a kind of confusion that I think that Jesus would rather enjoy.

The Palestinian conflict has dragged on since the early 1950s. In 2003 some Palestinian women and Israeli women met in session, in Oslo Norway.

The Palestinian women said they supported the Israelis right to an independent state; the Israeli women said that they supported the Palestinian right to resources, political integrity and freedom to live in the land. It was short of a two-state solution but it was a very significant political moment.

On the last day of the conference one Israeli woman and one Palestinian woman wanted to continue the discussion, asking the questions about what had been lost and what might be gained, if the two peoples were to live together well? They went out for coffee together.

When it came time to leave, the much older Israeli woman decided that she would walk the younger Palestinian woman back to her Hotel.

But the Palestinian woman after they got there, realizing the distance that the older woman would have to walk back, offered to walk her back halfway.

"I have had a wonderful night," the Israeli woman said as they parted.

“The time with you was itself worth the conference.”

The young woman went silent for a moment. “I’m glad for you,” she said, “but I’m confused.”

The Israeli woman winced inside. “Why what’s wrong?” she asked.

“Oh, nothing is wrong,” the younger woman said. “I’m just confused. **I don’t know what to do now that my enemy has become my friend.**”

Oh, that the world would find such delightful confusion!

Amen.