

“The Healing of the Nations”

November 11, 2018
Isaiah 2:1-5 & Matthew 11:25-28

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Wall Street United Church

Heavenly Father, we come to you on a day of Remembrance, a day when we remember those who sacrificed their lives so that we could live in peace, and thank those who did come back for their service. We come together in sorrowful thanksgiving, seeking your healing power. We pray for your healing hand to be on us as individuals and as nations, so that one day war will cease, one day we will be healed by your loving hand, and one day we will all live in peace. Amen.

Exactly 100 years ago, this day, this very hour, World War I came to an end. At 5 a.m. this morning, 100 years ago, in a railway car in Northern France, Germany signed the Armistice that would end the war. They agreed that all shooting would stop at the 11th hour, on the 11th day, in the 11th month.

19 million people died in World War I. At the Battle of the Somme alone, 1 million soldiers died capturing a few dozen meters of land. On the morning of November 11th, on this very day 100 years ago, an estimated 10,900 soldiers were killed, injured, or went missing, all before 11 a.m. The cannons on both sides had been roaring right up until the last moment. Machine guns fired, with bullets whizzing overhead, right up until that last second before 11 a.m. At 10:58 a.m., 25-year-old Canadian Pvt. George Price was walking through a French village when a sniper's bullet found him, killing him instantly. He was the last Canadian soldier to die in WWI. A bugle called out at exactly 11 a.m., and all went silent.

It must have been such a contrast for the soldiers. There was probably about 2 minutes of complete and total silence on the front lines. Everyone was waiting in anticipation. Was the war really over? Would the other side keep fighting? Would another shot ring out? Another shell burst overhead? Would they suddenly hear the battle cries and guns as the enemy charged their position? ... But nothing. All was silent. The guns went silent. Then, slowly and quietly, the soldiers walked away from the front lines, abandoning their trenches forever.

Peace at last.

But was it peace for everyone? Was it truly peace? Is peace even the right word to use to describe the aftermath of war? The truth is that the war wasn't really over for most of those soldiers.

I'd like a quick show of hands — how many of you know or knew soldiers who came home from war who were still suffering from what they had gone through? How many of you knew soldiers who came home and weren't the same anymore?

The ancient Greeks called it “divine madness”. Veterans of the Civil War in the U.S. called it “having soldier's heart”. After WWI it was called “shell shock”. After WWII it was called “combat fatigue.” It wasn't until the Vietnam war that the term Post Traumatic Stress Disorder came into wide usage.

Let me tell you a story about Karl Marlantese. Karl was a Lieutenant in the U.S. Marines who served in Vietnam. He served with distinction, winning medals for his courage. At one point, charging and taking out an enemy machine gun nest, he saved his entire platoon, allowing the U.S. to take some random hill in the jungle.

Years later, after the war, he was driving with his 10 year-old daughter sitting in the back seat. He was stopped at an intersection when the car behind him started honking it's horn. The very next thing he remembers is standing on the hood of that car, stomping on the windshield. He suddenly came to his senses, looked around him, and saw scores of people staring at him like he was insane. He has no memory of getting out of his car, or jumping on the hood of the other car. He got down from the hood, and got back into his own car. His daughter had a look of fright and confusion, and she asked, “What happened?” Karl had no idea what had just happened. And he had no idea that this incident was in any way related to his experience in Vietnam. It wasn't until months later when he received therapy that he was diagnosed with PTSD.

Karl says to this day that it never goes away. He's learned to control it, but to this day whenever there is a sudden loud noise, his heart rate goes up, and he has to do some breathing and mental exercises, and repeat to himself that he's not in Vietnam, that he's safe, and he's not being shot at.

The soldiers who didn't come home paid the ultimate sacrifice. But the soldiers who did come home have paid a very heavy price for our country. Let me talk about PTSD for a moment. One of the most common misconceptions is that PTSD is a mental illness. It's not a mental illness — it's an injury, very similar to a concussion. In medical terms, the hypothalamus in the brain expands during the actual trauma, and it never goes back to normal size. Triggers in later years can cause pathways that bring everything back. When this happens, veterans with PTSD have a physical reaction that they can't control — things like their heartrate

suddenly going up. They get tunnel vision, and it can lead to offensive reactions, anxiety, and depression.

But there is good news — there is hope in my message this morning, and it's this: healing can happen. There will be scars, but healing can happen. You can get over the trauma that you've experienced.

But true healing, and true peace come from Christ.

The scripture today comes from Matthew 11: 25-28, when Jesus says: "No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son." In other words he's saying that he is the Son of God. A father really knows and recognizes his son, and a son recognizes his father instantly.

This verse reminds me of the story of my great-grandfather. He was standing in a streetcar in Montreal, when he looked down at the front page



of the Montreal Star. There on the front page was the picture of a soldier in the Korean War. He instantly recognized the soldier — it was his son, my mother's uncle, my great uncle, **Heath Matthews**. The picture itself is down there on display, and it's a powerful picture. I welcome you to come and look at it after the service. It's a picture you may recognize, as it's a famous war picture.

That is what this scripture says: "No one knows the Son except the Father." In other words, this is Jesus saying that he is the Son of God. And in the next verse he says, "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.

Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light." Let me sum up this entire verse: Jesus is saying, "I am the son of God, and if you come to me, I will give you healing and peace."

True healing comes from Christ. True peace comes from Christ.

When you invite Christ into your heart, Christ heals you, and brings you peace. And you change. You won't be the same anymore. Christ doesn't return you to the way you were before the trauma, or before the pain that you've suffered — the scars will still be there. But he enters your life, and comforts you. He allows you to face and understand your past, to accept it, and to cope with it. He allows you to love once again.

Nelson Mandela knew and understood this very fact. He was a leader for black South Africans suffering under Apartheid in the last half of the 20th century. For roughly 40 years he experienced firsthand the brutalities of apartheid and institutional racism that was South Africa. He witnessed friends getting beaten and killed, and he himself was thrown in jail for 27 years. When he was finally freed and as he walked away from that jail, he had a choice to make. By all accounts, Nelson Mandela should have held anger in his heart. He easily could have become President of South Africa, and enacted retribution and revenge against his white jailers. But he didn't. In his words, he writes "As I walked out the door toward the gate that would lead to my freedom, I knew that if I didn't leave my bitterness and hatred behind, I'd still be in prison." Nelson Mandela led South Africa through a time of healing. He invited his jailer to his Presidential Inauguration. He asked Archbishop Desmond Tutu to lead a 'Truth and Reconciliation Commission' to bring healing and forgiveness to the people of South Africa.

Desmond Tutu and his daughter Mpho Tutu wrote a book called "The Book of Forgiving" that was based on the forgiveness process during the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa. I understand that this church is running another course on that book. I encourage you to take that course, or at the very least, read that book. It will change you. It changed me. In that book, Desmond Tutu writes that the healing power of forgiveness can happen with individuals, but it can also happen with nations.

Let me close with a story from the Vietnam War. As many of you know, especially those of you who lived through that conflict; the Vietnam War literally tore the United States apart. Never had Americans been so divided since the Civil War 100 years earlier. In the U.S. there were protests and riots, students getting shot on campuses by the National Guard and soldiers coming home from Vietnam having rocks thrown at them by protesters. Families were divided over this war. A number of years after the war, in 1982, a National Memorial for the war in Vietnam was in the making. Veterans that were for the war wanted it to be large and honourable, while veterans and other groups who opposed the war did not want a monument that glorified the war in Vietnam. The design was the subject of great debate leading to bitterness, bringing the debate of the entire war back to the forefront of the U.S. consciousness.

In the end a very simple and elegant design was chosen — a simple black V, sloping gently into the earth, with the name of every service man and woman who was killed or missing in Vietnam engraved into the granite.



The memorial brought everyone together. Former supporters of the war, former protesters, veterans, family members — everyone found meaning in that memorial. You see, in the end they all agreed on one thing — that the people lost in that war needed to be remembered. The memorial helped heal the nation.

As is written in Isaiah 2, which we heard earlier, one day the house of the Lord will be established on the top of the mountains, and all nations will flow unto it. They shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning-hooks; and nations shall not lift up sword against nation. One day we will all go up that mountain, and healing and peace will truly be with us.

Thanks be to God, Amen.

Let us Pray:

Heavenly Father, we thank you and we praise you for your healing power. We pray Lord, for those of us hurting or for those of us in pain on this day. Take our hand in yours. Surround us with your healing love. Heal us Father God. Help us to remember our fallen soldiers, and help us to thank and support our soldiers who returned. Help them to heal, and bring us peace. Amen.