



Lest We Forget

It is not a widely known fact, but during the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbour, a small number of Japanese pilots were shot down and killed. Those whose bodies were recovered were placed in an unmarked mass grave and quickly forgotten.

Some time later, ceremonies were held to honour the US service personnel who were killed during the attack. As the ceremonies were unfolding, a woman was seen placing a small bunch of flowers on the grave of the heretofore unmarked graves of the Japanese pilots. She was immediately surrounded by an angry crowd, who demanded to know what she was doing and why she thought it fit to "desecrate" the solemn occasion.

"Because I am a mother," she said unflinchingly. "And because they were someone's sons, too."

Equally little known is the fact that, when the United States dropped the atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the flight recorders of the planes involved captured the astonished and horrified gasps of the aircrew as they watched the monstrous mushroom cloud rise over their targets. One of the pilots was even heard to say: "May God forgive us. What have we done?"

Obviously, these recordings were kept under tight security. But when they eventually leaked out in the 1970s, one of the Japanese survivors declared: "I

used to think the Americans were inhuman devils. Then I heard the recordings of the bomber crews and realised they were human just like us. It never occurred to me that Americans could feel for the suffering of the Japanese people."

Both these examples illustrate the dehumanising impact of war. Dehumanising, not simply because of the suffering and destruction inflicted by combat, but because the process of war itself provides the excuse to forget that the "other side" are human, too. And forgetting that they are human enables us to justify all sorts of atrocities: whether it's concentration camps, or atomic and chemical weapons, or the use of sexual violence as a means of waging war.

But both these examples also illustrate that this dehumanising process need not be inevitable or even probable. Both the woman who faced down the angry crowd and the US service personnel who witnessed the devastating effects of the a-bomb recognised the humanity of "the enemy". Likewise the Japanese survivor came to realise that Americans were not "inhuman devils" and were capable of empathy precisely because they, too, had suffered. In all these cases, what connected the participants was their shared recognition of the humanity that is common to all of us - a humanity it is even more important to recognise when societal or other pressures (or even the necessity of legitimate self-defence) are presenting us with the opportunity to dehumanise others.

That is why the Cross has become the essential symbol of Christian faith. Because the suffering and injustice of the Easter event is a reminder of God's radical solidarity with our humanity. It is God's assertion of the dignity of the human person, even in the most extreme of circumstances, and to the exclusion of the claims of politics, economics, social ideology and religious belief. Despite our brokenness and the inhumanity with which we treat one another, God does not forget our humanity - even to the extent of becoming human with us and suffering injustice at our hands.

ANZAC Day and Remembrance Day and their equivalents around the world are all too easily hijacked by political and social forces wishing to manipulate the strong emotions they evoke for their own purposes. As Christians, we are reminded that we are not merely neutral observers on such occasions: we are witnesses to the heavenly shalom that decries all conflict, that seeks to bring reconciliation and healing to all peoples, and which ultimately defies ideologies of all descriptions to declare and make real the Kingdom of God.

Worship This Sunday

Worship this Sunday will be lead by Caz Coleman. As this will be her final service at Heathmont, please get along to support her and thank her for her ministry among the congregation.

Yarra Yarra News

The latest newsletter from the Presbytery of Yarra Yarra is now available. To read, please [click this link](#).

Hotham Mission Vacancy

Hotham Mission is looking for a qualified accountant to join its Board in the role of Treasurer.

Hotham Mission is part of the Parish Mission of the Congregation of Mark the Evangelist, which serves the North Melbourne, Parkville, Flemington and Kensington areas. It's a small organization committed to serving the poorest and most disadvantaged in its area through a range of food relief and education programs. It runs homework programs, a holiday program, and a program for young, socially isolated women, mostly from the Islamic community. It provides

weekly food bags to students whose families do not have enough to eat, and a breakfast program in one school for hungry students. It gives 4 bursaries every year to students moving from secondary to tertiary education and provides help to secondary school students who cannot afford books and computers. The majority of those receiving help from Hotham Mission are from refugee and asylum seeker backgrounds.

Hotham Mission is well-respected in the local community, by schools and by those who receive its help.

Hotham Mission wants to continue this good work, but urgently needs a treasurer to join the Board. The Board is an active and committed group of people from the congregation and from neighbouring ecumenical partners (currently an Anglican and Baptist congregation). However we want to add to the Board's financial expertise, and an accountant Treasurer is an essential role we need to fill.

If you feel called to help in this important local/ congregation-based work, please contact:

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Blessings,

Brendan



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