

Sermon
9 November 2014
West Kirk of Calder & Polbeth Harwood

By: Rev Dr Jonanda Groenewald

Text: Psalm 137

Remembrance Sunday

1914. Soldiers, young men, patriots – excited, honoured to go fight for their country in the Great War, the war that was supposed to end all wars.

2014. Today. 100 years later. People looking back on the 1st World War, the 2nd World War, and many other conflicts between nations, some even going on this very minute. So – the Great War *didn't* end all wars...

Conclusion: War is not the answer.

Why are people always fighting? It's been like that since the beginning of time really.

In 586 BC the Babylonians invaded Jerusalem. They even tore down the temple of God on mount Zion. The Israelites who weren't killed in the siege were taken captive, to work as slaves in Babylon.

They were devastated. God warned them that this could happen, but they didn't believe him. They thought that God lived in his temple, and

they felt completely lost and disorientated now, in this foreign land where everything was different from what they were used to.

Their captors asked them to sing them songs, but they just couldn't. They were too sad, and it just didn't feel right. They used to sing to God in his temple, how could they sing those holy songs here in an unholy, gentile country in front of unholy people? They couldn't even cleanse themselves ritually, although they were at a riverside, because of the unholy place they were in. They felt not only far from home, but far from God too.

But even though they felt alone and isolated, they vowed never to forget about Jerusalem. They said: "If I forget you, O Jerusalem, may my right hand forget its skill". Your right hand was your important hand, the hand in which you held your sword, the hand you defended yourself with. They would rather become vulnerable and undefended, than forgetting about Jerusalem, and thus about God.

They also said: "May my tongue cling to the roof of my mouth if I do not remember you, if I do not consider Jerusalem my highest joy." They were happy to lose the ability to sing songs of praise completely, if they couldn't sing these to God anymore.

Remembering Zion, remembering Jerusalem, remembering God, that's what kept them alive in those difficult years of captivity.

Remembering is very important.

.....

I find it very interesting that a *psalm* was written about the people of God not being able to *sing*, because psalms were *sung*.

Singing psalms was a means of remembering – they never wanted to forget how awful it was when they were in exile in Babylon – they wanted this psalm to remind them to live in such a way that something like that never happened again.

Very many years later this Psalm was turned into a pop-song and made famous by the group Boney M in 1978. So it's still sung, even today! Everybody knows "By the rivers of Babylon...", I'm not so sure if everybody knows that it comes from the Bible though!

And this song, about not being able to sing in a time of war, of feeling far away from God in a time of war, made me think about another song – a song by a famous South African singer, Laurika Rauch, a song entitled "Hot Gates".

And since today is about reflecting and remembering, I want you to listen to this song – see if it takes you back to one of the places she is singing about...

Listen to "Hot Gates".

Apart from the chorus, this song is just a list of places. But all these places have something in common – its different places all over the world that's all been affected by war or unrest.

She acknowledges that although war is about the men fighting – she sighs and says “oh my daughter, oh my son” – because it’s never only about the people on the battlefield – the innocent always gets hit hard too...

And then she ends the song with these words:

There's another song that will be sung

There's another bell that must be rung

There's another city I've been told where the streets are paved with gold...

So very many people’s lives have been destroyed by war. So many families have been broken up by war. So many cities have been wiped out or changed completely because of war.

War is a sad sad situation. But luckily, we should remember, that war is not the end – because there is another city – a city that can never be destroyed with bullets or fire or even chemical warfare – and that is the city where the streets are paved with gold.

No matter what happens to us here on earth, there will always be a safe place for us with God.

God asked his people in Old Testament times to be obedient to him alone, to live in peace and harmony with each other, but they didn’t manage. He then sent Jesus to earth to teach his people what real love is, and to show them that they needed to live in love and harmony with each other, but they didn’t manage. Up until today, we struggle with that.

Sometimes we can't even love our neighbours, so how on earth will we then be able to love our enemies?!

But that's what God wants. He wants our lives here on earth to be a mirror image of what our lives are going to be like one day in heaven. We're not there yet, but we have to try. So let's not hang up our harps on the poplar trees of this world, but sing to the glory of God, so that everybody around us can hear us and remember that because God love us, we should love each other too.

So let's remember those who have paid the ultimate sacrifice for our freedom, and tell the generations to come what they went through, so nobody would ever want to start any kind of war again.

God doesn't want our gates and our cities to be on fire. The only fire we should ever experience is the fire in our hearts, burning to the glory of God, and spreading all over the world.

So let's remember, and *live*.

Amen