

**War & Peace: Reflections & Readings**  
**A sermon delivered at the**  
**Lakehead Unitarian Fellowship, Thunder Bay, Ontario**  
**Sunday, November 11, 2012**

by The Rev. Suzanne Wasilczuk

**Sermon: “War & Peace: Reflections & Readings”**

**Reading:**

“On the eleventh hour of the eleventh day of the eleventh month in 1918, World War I ended. A year later, Woodrow Wilson proclaimed this day, November 11, Armistice Day in the hope that it would be associated with the quest for world peace. [The day was specifically dedicated by [King George V](#) on 7 November 1919 as a day of remembrance for members of the armed forces who were killed during World War I.] [In the United States] An act of Congress in 1954 changed the name of Armistice Day to Veterans’ Day.”

“During the thirty-six years between the creation of Armistice Day and its renaming, the world witnessed the Great Depression and the Spanish Civil War. World War II followed – the costliest war in history, with more than twenty-two million dead and thirty-four million wounded. We developed and used atomic weapons for the first time. The Korean War soon followed. The modern era proved itself a time not of world peace but of massive disillusionment.

[In the United States] the War Department was renamed the Department of Defense, a change seeming to reflect our modern confusion in which we aggressively pursue military action but always justify it as a matter of necessary self-defense. We are apparently convinced we will always need the military and thus always create veterans. The name and intention of Armistice Day has faded from memory, and the holiday on November 11 has become a time, not to meditate on the end of war, but to thank those who fought,” (Edward Tick, *War and the Soul*, 245-246)

In a Peanuts cartoon Lucy, that perennial curmudgeon and pessimist, draws a heart on a fence. The heart seems to have a jagged line down the middle, and half of it is shaded. Lucy tells her little brother Linus, “This, Linus, is a picture of the human heart! One side is filled with hate and the other side is filled with love. These are two forces which are constantly at war with each other.”

Linus stands there, soaks in all this information, starts looking a little queasy and says, “I think I know just what you mean... I can feel them fighting.”

Unitarian Universalists feel a bit queasy about this subject of war, the reality of conflict and the ideal of peace.

We’re a bit at war with ourselves on this Remembrance Day – most of us know veterans, or folks who have served in the military.

Many of us have marched against war, especially the recent conflicts – they’re not so recent anymore. We stood on street corners with signs, signed petitions, sang songs, wrote letters.

In our society, as well as in other cultures, a religious component is visible not only in peacemaking efforts, but in war-making. War is heavenly sanctioned. We read in the Hebrew Bible, in the book of Exodus that “The Lord is a man of war.” (15:3) Yahweh commands his people to slaughter their enemies.

We have the Greek Bible, the New Testament.

Jesus speaks of peace and mercy and non-violence. “Those who live by the sword shall perish by the sword.” (Matthew 26:52)

Yet, religious arguments are often used to justify war.

St. Augustine formulated the Just War theory. Augustine declares “the natural order conducive to peace among mortals demands that the power to declare and counsel war should be in the hands of those who hold supreme authority.” So, a war is just if it is declared by a legitimate authority descended from God, is waged for a just cause, and is guided by the good intentions “of securing peace, punishing evil-doers, and uplifting the good.” (War & Soul, 39)

Our every war is portrayed as a Just War – a war to secure peace, to roust out Evil or to punish the evil, to preserve and uplift the good.

Different motives fuel an unjust war. St. Augustine tells us the unjust war is fueled by “the passion for inflicting harm, the cruel thirst for vengeance, an unpacific and relentless spirit, the fever of revolt, the lust of power.”

Nobody wants to admit they are part of an unjust conflict.

Speaking of the United States Civil War in his Second Inaugural Address, Abraham Lincoln said, “Both [sides] read the same Bible, and pray to the same God; and each invokes [God’s] aid against the other...”

Every war is portrayed as a Just War – securing peace, punishing the evil, uplifting the good.

Our society idealizes war. We have a love/hate relationship with violence. Our two-sided hearts are “constantly at war with each other.”

### **#1 – We light a candle for all of us, struggling with the ideas of peace and war.**

Blessed are the peacemakers.

Bless those who serve.

### **Reading:**

Canadian World War II veteran Farley Mowat wrote a war memoir, *And No Birds Sang*, in 1987. In it Mowat writes:

Let it be said then that I wrote this book in the absolute conviction that there never has been, nor ever can be, a ‘good’ or worthwhile war. Mine was one of the better ones (as such calamities are measured), but still, a bloody awful thing it was. So awful that through three decades I kept the deeper agonies of it wrapped in the cotton-wool of protective forgetfulness, and would have been well content to leave

them buried forever... but could not, because the Old Lie – temporarily discredited by the Vietnam debacle – is once more gaining credence; a whisper which soon may become another strident shout urging us on to mayhem.

*Today we remember those who served in the past; those who have been warriors; those damaged by war, injured, killed.*

Edward Tick characterizes a warrior this way: “The ideal warrior is assertive, active, and energized. He or she is clear-minded, strategic and alert. A warrior uses both body and mind in harmony and cooperation. A warrior is disciplined. A warrior assesses both his own resources and skills and those arrayed against him. A warrior is a servant of civilization and its future, guiding, protecting, and passing on information and wisdom. A warrior is devoted to causes he judges to be more important and greater than himself or any personal relationships or gains. Having confronted death, a warrior knows how precious and fragile life is and does not abuse or profane it.” (WS177)

“A warrior’s first priority is to protect life rather than destroy it. He serves his nation in peace as well as in war-making and dissuades his people from suffering the scourges of war unless absolutely necessary. He uses the fearlessness he has developed to help keep sanity, generosity, and order alive in his culture. A warrior disciplines the violence within himself. Internally and externally, he stares violence in the face and makes it back down. A warrior serves spiritual and moral principles, which he places higher than himself. The role of warrior has a high, noble, and honorable status.” (WS250-251)

We have known gentle and wise warriors.

However noble, however heroic is the role of the warrior, the price is high. For our young men and women. For those with whom they fight. And for those caught in the middle.

We have seen the numbers: approximately 30,000 Canadian service personnel were deployed to Afghanistan. 160 Canadian soldiers killed in the Afghanistan conflict. 2000 injured. [At the same time, 6,200 American soldiers killed, hundreds of thousands wounded.] Well over a million Iraqi & Afghani civilians have died, killed directly because of the conflicts, or indirectly through the displacement of war.

<http://www.parl.gc.ca/Content/LOP/ResearchPublications/2011-97-e.htm>; accessed 8 November 2012.

Though Canadian forces have ended their combat role, about 1,000 members of the Canadian Forces remain to mentor and train Afghani troops.

### **Reading:**

The young dead soldiers do not speak.

Nevertheless, they are heard in the still houses:

who has not heard them?

They have a silence that speaks for them at night  
and when the clock counts.

They say: We were young. We have died.  
Remember us.

They say: We have done what we could but until  
it is finished it is not done.

They say: We have given our lives but until it is  
finished no one can know what our lives gave.

They say: Our deaths are not ours; they are yours;  
they will mean what you make them.

They say: Whether our lives and our deaths were  
for peace and a new hope or for nothing we  
cannot say; it is you who must say this.

They say: We leave you our deaths. Give them  
their meaning.

We were young, they say. We have died.  
Remember us.

Archibald MacLeish, poet, 1892-1982

## **#2 – *We light another candle for all our warriors; for all our dead.***

Blessed are the peacemakers.

Bless those who serve.

### **Reading: *Wounded Warriors***

Why did you join the military? Was it duty, honor, and country? Economic necessity? To leave behind childish ways? To get as far away from home as possible? To see the world? Most likely, you are serving for a combination of some or all of these and many other reasons. The burden and privilege of military service is the opportunity and responsibility to travel – sometimes to hell and back in harms' way, sometimes to the world's most magnificent vistas, sometimes to its loneliest and most remote corners.

We are world travelers, for better and for worse. We experience that which others never will, for better and for worse. We grow up in the process, for better and worse...

Too often as we venture out into the world – all of its triumph and tragedy, joy and sorrow, heaven and hell – we risk severing our roots. We lose touch with our reasons for being and serving. We drift further away from our families and loved ones. We change more than we want or they expect, and we return home. In the end, we have to return home....

Matthew & Gail Tittle in *Bless All Who Serve: Sources of Hope, Courage and Faith for Military Personnel and Their Families*

*Today we remember those who serve now, those in harm's way.*

A fellow Meadville Lombard student, David Pyle, a former Green Beret and now a US Army Reserve chaplain, served in Bosnia and writes: "For me, upon returning from Bosnia, it took about twelve months before I quit looking for land mines in the road, quit yelling out my window at fellow drivers, quit driving like I was in NASCAR, and quit getting into fights for no apparent reason."

The soldier's mindset – "battle mind" – requires hypersensitivity to all signs of danger. But this constant awareness of threats clashes with civilian life – with marriage, raising kids, navigating traffic.

Edward Tick writes of the shadow side of the warrior. The shadow side may demonstrate as “aggression, vengefulness, or cruelty.” Wild, emotionally explosive, impulsive, hypersexual, compulsive, masochistic or sadistic behavior may manifest. (WS178)

We have known gentle and wise warriors. And we have known, we have heard of, those wounded, heart-weary, soul-sick, explosive warriors.

The Library of Parliament issued a report based on a Statistics Canada study. Estimates are that between 10 and 20% of military personnel who have served in Iraq or Afghanistan suffer from Post Traumatic Stress Disorder or Traumatic Brain Injury. [In the U.S., The Veteran’s Administration reports that thirty percent of the soldiers, sailors, airmen and marines returning from combat actions are reporting mental health problems.]

What was once called shell shock, battle fatigue, combat psychosis, we call a psychiatric disorder. Soldier’s heart, wounded heart, sick soul might be more accurate.

As we see our young people, our veterans, return home, what help will we extend to them, what tools to heal their hearts and souls?

How will we commemorate this Armistice Day, this Remembrance Day?

**#3 – We light a third candle for all those who serve, for all those who help restore wounded bodies, minds and spirits.**

Blessed are the peacemakers.

Bless all who serve.

**#4 & 5 – We light a candle for the families of those who serve.**

**And we light a candle for all civilians caught in struggles around the world.**

**Congregational Reflection: Remembering Those Who Serve**

**[We will keep these candles lit through the Fellowship hour]**

In the Holy Quiet of this hour, their names surround us and they live with us in blessed memory. May we remain together in silence, as a tribute to all that they mean to us, all that they have meant to us. [Wayne B, Arnason] / **Silent Meditation**

**Benediction/Extinguishing the Candles & Chalice**

Let there be peace in the sky and in the atmosphere,  
peace in the plant world and in the forests;

Let the cosmic powers be peaceful;

Let Brahma (the Hindu god of creation) be peaceful;

Let there be undiluted and fulfilling peace everywhere.

[*Atharva Veda*, a 3000-year-old sacred Hindu text]