

SB@St Anne's Brondesbury  
Remembrance Sunday 13th November 2016

Privilege to be with you today on Remembrance Sunday. This is always a poignant Sunday and even more so in this year when we have marked the 100th anniversary of the battle of the Somme, and remembered the loss of that generation of young men whose lives were sacrificed, sadly in vain, in the war they believed would end all wars. Despite the hundred years that have passed it's closer to us than some more recent conflicts perhaps because of

- that searing final episode of Blackadder or
- the poetry we studied at school which touched our souls and etched the desolation of Flanders fields into the core of our beings. ‘

They shall not grow old as we that are left grow old. Age shall not weary them nor the years condemn. At the going down of the sun and in the morning, we will remember them’

- Two years ago, the poppies of the Tower of London, one for each life lost, brought home the immense scale - it's so hard to comprehend the immensity of a million but those poppies revealed that to us
- and of course, there are the family connections. My grandfather's brother, my great uncle, James Bowman, was one of the fallen of the Somme.

We remember, lest we forget, in case we forget, the sacrifices, the pain. We remember, lest we forget, the lessons of history – that all it takes for evil to succeed is for good people to

do nothing, and that that war should be the last of last resorts. Sadly though, memory can be selective - there are so many conflicts across our world that we have slipped from memory, a whole list we have forgotten - think of the Korean War, Pol Pot, Columbia. And even today, when we cannot fail to think of Aleppo, or Mosul, or Helmand, there are other conflicts that seldom get airtime but where there is a daily toll of attrition and loss of life. We think of Central African Republic, or DRC Congo, Sudan and South Sudan and with real sadness I have to add Mozambique to this sad list. It feels like we are living in the times described in today's Gospel 'Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. '

Jesus however challenges us to action not despair. He encourages us to be peacemakers – in Matthew 5 'blessed are the peacemakers for they shall be called the children of God'. We know how difficult a call this is in our pessimistic, cynical world where the arms trade seems to be a lynchpin of economic prosperity. But today, on this particular Sunday, working for peace seems the only possible response we can make as we remember all lives lost in conflict - lives that could have been lived differently had they not ended too soon before their potential and love could be realised.

So it's very special that you are hosting the festival of non-violence encompassing this national day, as you flag up, encourage and challenge this wider interfaith community to explore alternatives to the conflict and violence that has maimed and scarred the landscape of human history. And it's very special to have a sculpture from Mozambique as a symbol and example of an alternative way to ensure lasting peace. The transforming arms into tools or the swords into ploughshares project is a church led vision of one country's

endeavour to be peacemaker and to roll away the legacy of a bitter civil war. The idea of course is from Isaiah 2

He will teach us his ways,  
so that we may walk in his paths.”

The law will go out from Zion,  
the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.

4 He will judge between the nations  
and will settle disputes for many peoples.

They will beat their swords into ploughshares  
and their spears into pruning hooks.

Nation will not take up sword against nation,  
nor will they train for war anymore.

The Anglican Church in London has been twinned with Angola and Mozambique since 1998 in ALMA (Acronym in English -means soul in Portuguese) This was a bold step because at that point Mozambique's post-colonial civil war had only ended 6 years earlier and Angola was still in a civil war which didn't end until 2002. Both of these former Portuguese colonies had to struggle for independence in the 1960's. Both were decimated by these wars which demolished the little infrastructure left, displaced vast numbers of the population, and rendered much of the land unusable.

The project was the idea of Bishop Dinis Segulane - the Anglican Bishop of Lebombo for 38 years who is a sort of Mozambican Tutu. (I have brought you copies of our 2014 annual report so you can see him). He played a key role in the peace negotiations of the 1980's and 90's and in the preparation for peace programme as chair of the ecumenical Christian Council of Mozambique's peace and reconciliation committee. Groups from each province were trained in peace building (including a ban on toy guns) and then went back home and taught the course to 10 more people who taught 10 more. "If we pool our resources, the faith community can reach all over the country. We are in every village all over the country. We go where government cannot go,"

Many weapons were not handed in after the war ended and these were seen to be a huge threat to a lasting peace. 'I say to people that sleeping with a gun in your bedroom is like sleeping with a snake – one day it will turn round and bite you'. Hence the project. 'We tell people: "We are not disarming you. We are transforming your guns into ploughshares, so you can cultivate your land and get your daily bread."'

What happened next is very special –

- Weapons collected -tools given in exchange
- Metal absolved of the crimes committed with it
- Cut up and decommissioned
- Street children's welding workshop -Bishop Dinis' pectoral cross (Also +Rachel's)
- Artists develop – animals instruments, playful sculptures that speak of hope amid the legacy of suffering

- exhibition in Oxo Tower in London in 2002
- British Museum Thorne of Weapons
- 2005 Tree of Life Commissioned for year of Africa -See at British museum Africa Gallery + video!
  
- And then of course there's music man – a rather more personal sculpture but one that embodies a part of the 1998 ALMA partnership Covenant 'Partnership is a deep friendship between two people which engages their families and their offspring'.
  
- In 2004 our youngest son went on a school visit to his twin school in Mozambique at the same time as our eldest son was having chemotherapy. As a family we were held in prayer by the church there throughout Edd's treatment and death in January 2005. In 2006 Music Man came to our family as a tribute to our music man (Edd was a talented musician). The sculptor Kester somehow catching something of Edd's quirky personality and encouraging us to look outwards and let the music play again.
  
- Peace in Mozambique is sadly not complete. Despite a million weapons having been taken out of commission by the project there has been a resurgence of conflict in the last three years – not a war but enough skirmishing and random attacks to disrupt and destabilize, to hinder development and to create a climate of fear especially in the middle of the country.

- The churches in Mozambique maintain their prophetic witness for peace – and these sculptures are a powerful symbol of that hope.
- Here in London each year there are young people lost to knife crime - we understand the lament of their families, – could we as London faith communities learn from Moz and do a knife version of swords into ploughshares? Could we be the instrument of peace and healing? Blessed are the peacemakers..... Let us pray

Lord, create in us a love of peace:  
Not peace that is the absence of struggle,  
not a peace that is blind to injustice,  
but peace that makes whole what is now broken.

## ALMA Covenant descriptors

1. Partnership is mutual respect and transparency.
2. Partnership is a deep friendship between two people which engages their families and their offspring.
3. To be a partner is to be one another's angel.
4. To be a partner is to be one another's keeper.