

We will remember them

Everyone has a famous line. When my youngest son was three and I'd start to reprimand him for something or another, he'd interrupt me with what has become his famous line - "Daddy . . . let's talk about nice things".

On Anzac Day we commit ourselves as a nation to talk about the things that are not nice. In World War I, 17 million lives were lost. It was 'the Great War', 'The War to end all Wars'. Twenty-one years later, World War II began; between sixty and eighty million people died, approximately three percent of the entire world's population.

In this context there is no room for wish-fulfilment, for 'looking on the bright side of life', claiming that 'every cloud has a silver lining'. A friend of mine is a Chaplain in the Australian Defence Force. I could never imagine him saying any of these kinds of things to the families who had lost a son or daughter, husband or wife, brother, sister, friend.

But in the face of grief and loss we must do something; we must seek a narrative, a story, if healing is to ever begin. War is a magnet for narratives of every colour and shade. The narratives we disagree with we call propaganda. Devastation puts narratives under pressure and under the pressure of war, a narrative of mere optimism will not hold. What is required is a narrative of hope, and real hope, as distinct from optimism, has a basis, a foundation, a rock on which it stands.

A narrative of hope will not defend the battle, justify the horrors, demonise the enemy, or celebrate the heroes. But it will seek to uphold the sacredness of every life, lost and saved.

It will be able to look full in the face of devastation, like David looking into the face of Goliath, and be able to see each life lost, but not in vain.

Over the Christmas break my family spent a day at the Australian War Memorial in Canberra. In an exhibition by Alex Seton I saw a narrative of hope. Seton had created forty-one marble versions of the 'ceremonial folded flag . . . presented to the family of each fallen soldier' (AWM). In a small room I stood alone and surrounded by forty-one testaments to Australian lives lost in Afghanistan; each flag representing 'a specific individual'. In the presence of those forty-one marble flags, forty-one acts of commitment and sacrifice, media headlines dissolved.

Stories of hope often begin by causing us to notice something that we've previously overlooked. At a funeral recently we began by recalling a story where Jesus is sitting with friends at a market. He points to a couple of sparrows in a cage and promises that even though they will be sold for a few cents, not one of them will fall to the ground outside of God's care.

Anzac Day is a powerful reminder that in the midst of carnage we will do something; something that is important and powerful and hopeful:

'At the going down of the sun and in the morning, We will remember them'.



<https://www.awm.gov.au/exhibitions/seton/>

James Godfrey
EACH Chaplain