

Late autumn reminds me of an important difference between Joel and me. It is about our ancestors and war.

You know that novel “War and Peace” by Tolstoy? My mum figured nobody should ever be permitted to go to war before reading it. Either they would start the book and never finish it (it’s a really long book) or the strong anti-war message of the novel would take effect. Either way was good. My mum didn’t like war. Most people don’t. In fact most people hate war, but they also think it’s inevitable. My mum said something else: She hated war and hoped a time wouldn’t come again when people were conscripted or compelled to fight by the government. If that happened again she would want to make it so none of us, her children, would have to fight. But she also was afraid that if she did that, someone else’s children would have to fight instead. Joel and his mum, and I know many of the rest of you and your parents, learned from an early age that there was a third option, one that meant that no parent would ever need to have to make that sacrifice. I’m selfishly counting on you to keep learning and teaching that way so that people like me can learn with you and find freedom.

People who know me well will know that poppies are one of my favourite flowers, so when I was younger I was always happy enough to pin one onto my jacket in late October or early November. It also felt important because I could draw a connection between Remembrance Day and my family’s experience. I had two grandfathers who had fought in the second world war. But as time went on I gradually became more aware of what we were celebrating and that the red color was for blood.

I will probably never know exactly how my grandfathers’ participation in the war affected the families and communities where they fought, but I know the impacts this war had on my own family back in Alberta. My mum was born while her father was away fighting, he never even knew his wife was pregnant when he left. Their marriage was unable to survive my granny’s anger at his enlisting and leaving her. Not long after his return, he was

drinking with some friends while out on a boat and when the boat capsized he died of hypothermia. My mum was 5. My Dad's step father also fought in that war. When he came back though he was different. The funny, happy-go-lucky young man he had been was replaced by someone really angry. He also was unable to control his drinking and when he got drunk he was violent towards his wife, my dad's mum.

I love that my husband hits fast-forward to avoid watching the violent parts in TV shows and movies even though I sometimes find it hard to follow the plot afterwards. I love that he doesn't and will never accept violence as inevitable.

Jesus also likes to mess with the remote. He experiences time differently than most people. Around the time of the gospel reading you heard today a lot of pressure is building. They are getting close to Jerusalem and Jesus knows that the people think the kingdom of God is going to appear soon. He also knows something terrible: that within 40 years there is going to be a war with the Roman Empire. During this war, the temple in Jerusalem would be destroyed and a quarter of Judea's population would die. The burden of that foreknowledge is so great that Jesus needs to press pause on his own narrative. He is about to enter Jerusalem on a donkey. His followers are already cheering wildly and lining the path with palm branches and stuff. But he stops, looks at the city and weeps. I think there's only one other time he weeps in the gospel. And that's when his friend Lazarus dies. The interesting thing is that Lazarus doesn't stay dead. Jesus heals him. So maybe that also says something about all the pain in and around Jerusalem too. We can hope. After he cries for a while he gets back on his donkey and rides into the city. Even though he knows this is all going to happen no matter what he tries to teach the people about peace. And because he does preach about peace and freedom, because he even dies for doing this, we are sitting here talking about peace and love and freedom today. He refuses to accept the inevitability of evil. And so should we..

While I was thinking about what I'd say today I asked Joel what he thought Jesus meant in this context when he said "the things that make for peace," but as we talked about it I felt uneasy. I asked google the same question and I found commentaries that talked about punishment and salvation and I didn't like that they were undermining Judaism. I decided that I didn't need to know what that meant for them, at least not now. The tears already said a lot to me. They spoke to me about deep humility and fierce love. They spoke to me about having the courage to confront something that maybe can't be fixed but also cannot be accepted. I imagined our hearts as hardened clay and thought about what water does to clay, how it softens it. I also thought about the River of Life from the book of Revelations and wondered what connection Jesus' tears might have to that River. There are trees growing beside that River. It says the leaves on the trees are for the healing of the nations. I think our world could really use those leaves and the tears that water them. I bet there is power in our tears too and that it's good to weep. Especially when we learn about wars and all the people who are affected by them. It's also good to do all we can to stop wars and bring peace, even if it seems futile.

Children cry more often and more freely than grown ups do. Jesus came as a child into a world where children often experience the consequences of war even more directly and intensely than adults. But they also have a lot of power to change the world for the better. When Oscar was barely able to speak he said to me: you carry me and I'll carry the world. Isn't that what all children say, one way or another? In the reading from Isaiah there is a connection made between the birth of a child and peace. Giving birth is painful. It also can be really scary. But most of us would concede that it is better to give birth than to kill someone. And most of us probably agree that being born is good. At least I hope so. In Romans 8 verse 22 says "We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time." Imagine that. Poor creation! My youngest came out in 15 minutes and that felt too long. Some think that the child anticipated by the prophet Isaiah is Jesus. Partly because of that,

Jesus is often given the title Prince of Peace. But Jesus himself says, "I bring not peace but a sword." Lots of violence happened because of him, starting with the Slaughter of the Innocents, the terrible day that King Herod sent his soldiers to kill all the babies in Bethlehem in case one of them was him. In Voltaire's Philosophical Encyclopedia he describes Jesus looking with deep sorrow at some of the carnage brought about by religious wars through the centuries. How strange and terrible that he should have the burden of this and to know that about himself. And so he weeps, Jesus weeps generation after generation after generation. Until the time we've all been waiting and watching and hopefully working towards arrives, and the child of peace is truly born on earth.

In the meantime:

Jesus's tears urge us to follow his example and press pause on our own narratives from time to time. To stand back and make way for the One who, according to the psalmist, makes wars cease to the ends of the earth, breaks the bow and shatters the spear; burns the shields with fire and says, "be still and know that I am God." (Psalm 46:9-10)