

WE REMEMBER

[Footnotes for quoted statistics are available upon request]

There are six things that God hates, and another that is almost as irritating to God.

It's good to know what upsets your boss, your teacher....or ...your partner,.... or for that matter, anyone who you respect or has power over you.

So, you might want to highlight this passage and remember these 7 things.

As you know, today is our Peace Sunday on Remembrance Day.

As a peace church, we believe violence is not an acceptable path to peace. The dominant culture accepts violence, albeit reluctantly, as sometimes an unavoidable path to peace--called redemptive violence.

We will keep the two perspectives in mind as we review the list of 7; however, Peace is the filter we will be looking through.

Number 1: looking down on others / being scornfully arrogant.

I think both groups can be guilty of this. There are some sanctimonious pacifists, as there are some haughty pro-military people. Humility with openness to the grey in-between areas may be a better way.

Number 2.

God hates dishonest, deceiving messages.

War and the culture that plans to win at war is full of lies and deceptions, and all military nations plan to win at war.

Threats and Enemies are fabricated or exaggerated in order to rationalize spending billions of dollars on the military.

Of course we need to defend our arctic boundaries ...and... there is terrible chaos out there.... somewhere that must be destroyed.

Saddam Hussein had weapons of mass destruction, and Poland was threatening Nazi Germany.....

To be sure, war includes misinformation and cover-ups.

And then, when it is over, the victors get to form the glorious narrative to justify all the ugliness and loss.

In reality, WWII was not a justified moral war. It was a political war, and both sides did terrible things. Granted, the Nazis may have done more, yet the Allies firebombing cities was atrocious, too, and that is but one example.

And, the untruths are usually believed, when repeated often enough.

We are told that soldiers paid for our freedom, and most people believe it without question.

War and the culture of war is laden with lies. In addition, recruitment often includes deception, too, but I'll mention that later.

And, in all fairness: pacifists must include the whole Biblical story in their narrative, and not infer to own the mind of Jesus.

Number 3: God hates actions that shed innocent blood.

Innocent is a debatable assessment.

One way is to assume we are all guilty, no one is innocent; therefore the strongest wins.

Another, the popular version, is thinking that bad guys--our enemies are guilty and we're innocent. Yet, it's funny how both sides think that.

The third way is believing that we are not to judge, and must regard all as innocent, and so killing is prohibited.

*Your choice on those options.

Nevertheless, people die in war. Death and destruction are horrible consequences of war.

The recent war on Iraq cost 4,488 American soldiers and 1487 contracted fighters. Estimates of Iraqi losses range from 100,000 to 1 1/2 million. There is no accurate count,... and many are still dying in the conflict and from munitions and depleted uranium lying around. The civilians, the innocent suffer greatly in war.

Canadian losses in our war in Afghanistan is 162 (158 soldiers). The last Canadian soldier to die, was from Swift Current, on Oct 29, 2011.

The human cost of war is deplorable, and there are other costs, too.

There is extensive destruction to the physical and to good will, and there is the monetary cost.

We are told that our military action in Afghanistan cost \$22 billion dollars, yet it is likely much higher..... as war includes cover-ups and deception.

To be sure, the greatest consequence is the shedding of innocent blood, and that angers God.

Number 4 deals with those who devise wicked plans.

No doubt, corrupt leaders fall into this category, but so does the military industrial complex. Those who make and profit from the making of weapons are doing wicked things.

Did you know that Canada is the 6th biggest arms dealer?

[from US Congressional Research Services]

We rank higher than China, and we are 17th in overall weapons production.

There are over 1,000 companies in the Ottawa region alone that have military contracts.

And note, many weapons companies are subsidized with tax payers' money.

For example, C.A.E. Inc., of Montreal, has received 24 million dollars in grants and tax cut incentives.

Canadians should not think that we are a symbol for Global Peace.

In truth, we are not.

Moreover, like it or not, most of us are involved in this business, indirectly.

Many pension plans invest in those profitable companies.

Our taxes and our information gathering system is integrated with the weapons based companies.

The software for our national census is from Lockheed Martin, at a cost of 19.7 million dollars. And, the contract for software support gives them access to confidential information that is gathered from the census.

We are complicit in the production of wicked plans.

Number 5: God is angered by those who run to evil.

Generally, we humans will not identify and select evil as a destination to quickly achieve. We tend to want to do the right thing,..... but the big picture,..... we may not be doing so.

At this point, and with number 6 and 7, things get rather grey and convoluted.

People become soldiers because they want to do the right thing.

Their passion and commitment is worthy of honour, and many did good things, such as peace keeping and rescue services.

Yet, the concept of the military is to be prepared to do violence, to do war, and this is problematic, including for those who claim that war is a necessary evil.

In addition, the leaders in the weapons industry, rush in to equip their nation when it's going to war. I think that qualifies as running to evil.

Number 6: God does not like those who are living a lie.

During our combat mission in Afghanistan, our nation was obsessed with building schools and helping girls get an education in Afghanistan. I don't recall, much concern about their education system,.... before 2001,... or even before 2007. And, what about now? Our children's loose change collection, today, is going to help some.

Also, I've put recruitment and soldiering in this category, including how soldiers and veterans are treated.

It is puzzling how we glorify soldiers as if it is a wondrous vocation, yet the military needs to recruit people to join with fancy, hyped up ads and promises. ??? Something is a bit off. ????

I do appreciate those who chose to be a soldier because they really wanted to help / to contribute to making the world a better place, even though there are more effective ways than through the military.

Others respond from a sense of duty and patriotism.

One out of ten Canadians joined the military during WWII believing it was the "right thing" to do.

And,...many turn to soldiering as an escape from poverty or a perceived dead end.
Recruiters tend to target them the most,... often with blatant lies of enticement.
Most of the US military's non-commissioned officers are from lower income situations.

To be sure, Being a soldier, except in combat, is not bad. The basic needs of life are taken care of; there's training, great fellowship and lasting bonds are formed, and medals are handed out, too. Plus, there is the thrill of using some powerful tools / equipment. Young people enjoy exciting things.

BUT, the military is about war,.... and when war happens, the situation turns really ugly. Pretending the military is not about war is Not being honest.

In the US, today is known as Veterans Day.
The American culture is imbued with honoring and praising the troops and veterans,..... and we are becoming that way, too.

Yet, in reality, that is living a lie, except during sports events, certain ceremonies or parades.

Soldiers are used as pawns for political reasons, and we are not giving our Afghanistan war veterans adequate support for dealing with the effects of war. We claim to honour the troops / to "support them", but we are not.

And, that abuse is far worse in the US -- the home of honoring the veterans.
For every US soldier killed in Iraq and Afghanistan, 25 vets die from their own hands. American vets are committing suicide at a rate, averaging more than 6,500 per year.
Why? What sort of lie / deception is causing that?

2.4 million Americans fought in those wars, and 1/4 million suffer from combat trauma, PTSD... and many others suffer from exposure to toxic materials.
And, to limit open accountability, the US contracted private companies, such as Blackwater, to provide thousands of "professional soldiers" to assist in the wars. Little is known about how they are coping. But, we do know that the official soldiers were and are abused.

We can only imagine what sort of evil has been done to those men and women, and what sort of evil they have committed. ????

Yet,..... we all claim to honor our soldiers, to the point of glorifying them..... because.....they didn't Need to die. What did 162 Canadians pay for in Afghanistan?
Yet, the cost of war is so extremely high..... and **personal**.

When a soldier dies,..... the widow or closest relative..... gets a medal, and some financial compensation,..... but that's **not** enough to ease the loss, the assuage the pain.

So,.... a glory narrative is used to help fill the void.

Back in 2003, I was debating with a friend about the lies and evils of war, until she started to cry. I asked her what wrong?

She answered, "My father was buried with a flag over his coffin, I need to believe that he did not die in vain."

War..... may be evil,..... but it is also extremely personal.

Dear, wonderful and loved individuals were scarred by war or were killed in war--both friends and foes.

Here is one such person:

His name was Vern Snook. He was born in Wynot, Saskatchewan, in 1920. If you don't know where Wynot is, it is just south of Quill Lake.

He was a flying officer in the RCAF. He flew the Lancaster bomber.

When he got his orders to go overseas, he decided that he better marry his sweetheart before he left. They married in September of 1943. A few weeks later, he was shipped off to England.

On his very first mission--a bombing mission designed to kill people, he was shot down while entering the Netherland's airspace. It was October 20th, 1943.

As was the custom for those killed who are from Saskatchewan, after the war, a lake in northern Saskatchewan was named after him. Snook Lake is just north of Lake Athabasca.

*Vern Snook was married to my mother. She was given the Memorial Cross for her loss, and a small financial compensation.

Obviously, she did later marry another man,..... who was my father, and ironically, he was a pilot trainer in the RCAF.

A number of my relatives served in the military, and some were killed. My uncle Blake, who died a year ago August, spent 6 months in the front lines with the Black Watch. Whatever he experienced marred him for life.....

This whole issue is personal,..... and as I said before things / life can be grey and convoluted.

I have numerous relatives who were pacifists, too, such as Ernest Swalm. He became known as E.J. Swalm.

He was my great grandmother's brother.

During the Great War--WWI, he refused to serve in the military. Conscientious Objectors were not recognized then, so the Canadian government chose to torture him.... to get him to change his ways.

In 1918, he was living in Kindersley, but was sent to a military facility in Edmonton for "adjustment." One of things they did to him was to have him stand in a tank of water that was up to his neck for two days straight. That meant no resting or sleeping.

He didn't recant his devotion to non-violent service.

In fact, he went on to become instrumental in the formation of MCC (Mennonite Central Committee) and the governments change of policy that allowed for COs to do alternative services.

In 1949, he wrote the book, *Nonresistance under test: the experiences of a conscientious objector*. You can order it through Amazon. :)

He noted in the book, that during WWII over 10,000 Canadians chose to do "the right thing" without fighting. They were COs doing alternative service,..... and they didn't get a medal, nor are they included in parades or Remembrance Day services,.... and that exclusion is shameful.

All this relates to our two New Testament passages about being the peace... and number 7 of the list of things God distains.

Number 7:

God does not like those who sow / cause discord in a family.

I used my family as an example because it reflects the broader family--our family, our culture.

We have different views, and different histories,... and we have different passions..... and sorrows, too.

Therefore, if we strive to be peacemakers, then we must do just that.... by living and being the peace we proclaim.

Arrogance or devaluing soldiers is not promoting peace.

We do not need to participate in glorification, yet we must honor the person and the noble intent.

Moreover, if we want to be respected, and if we truly believe what we claim, then we must work as hard or harder than those who accept violence as a means to an end.

Soldiers are suffering and dying,..... and our cost / our pain should be just as high or higher.

In addition, I loved to see a robust and exciting alternative service for our youth. Why should the military have a corner on excitement?

We could encourage our youth to join CPT (Christian Peacemaker Teams) or do other such non-violent services.

We must live for peace..... and be the peace,..... as we remember.

Life is not black and white. Life is full of irony and inconsistencies. The human family is a strange mix, and we all need love and peace.

And, sometimes that may mean honoring and respecting what makes us uncomfortable.

Let us NEVER forget,..... may we always remember the truth,.... and the value of each human life.

I'll close with this: a picture and a box.

The picture is of a grave marker in a cemetery on one of the Friesland Islands, off the coast of the Netherlands. My uncle Blake took the picture in 1995 when he was there being honored for serving in WWII.

After a bit of a search, he found the cemetery and talked with the then 80 year old caretaker. He said that the caretaker told him, that he was the first Canadian to visit the cemetery.

In this box [show] are medals given to Vern Snook. I found them when going through my parents possessions.

I tried to find a relative of Vern's to give the metals to, but could not. His mother died years ago, and all of his siblings are dead.

My uncle Blake didn't want them, nor did the Nutana Legion.

I don't want them either.

I never knew the guy, and I'm here because he's not!

Yet,..... nobody else cares... or remembers,..... so I will.

Everybody is precious--everybody.

Life is strange: I'm a pacifist remembering a soldier,..... and I hope, by remembering,.....the whole story,.... that fewer people will chose violence as a way to peace.

And, I pray that we never forgot..... as we live to please God, instead of making others angry, including God.

Peace be with you.