



Winter 2021

Reflections on peace

It seems to me that we as a society, as Australians, are more concerned with war talk since the Vietnam war. Of course, Australia was directly involved in that conflict. For example, university friends were signing up or being conscripted. Many years later at Princes Hill I had a department full of Vietnamese children to teach.

Of course my grandparents might see things differently, remembering the many casualties of the World Wars. Others will have more recent memories of the aftermath of 9/11 and other conflicts.

But now it is different. There seems to be a preoccupation with war as if we were anticipating it, with our politicians, the media and countless dinner table talk all preoccupied with war.

War has become a metaphor in our times, whether it be climate change or Pandemics. Nations seem to be squandering their revenues for the purpose of winning the war here on earth (and perhaps in space as potential territory). So what has this got to do with Australia?

Despite many warnings about the need to consider the complexities of relationships within our region, our rhetoric includes possible “enemies” in this same region which too often ignores the other side of the coin, namely positive relationships which have been built up over the years.

Now it is time to talk about peace and that is what this rather different Newsletter wishes to explore. Our exploration and discussion must first draw upon the two writings of John Langmore.

Several weeks ago, Craig gave a sermon on the subject of peace. As a congregation, we are blessed with a church which offers us all a safe place within which we are nurtured and supported in our personal and joint pursuits of peace, through the Liturgy, the sermons, the Eucharist and the music/singing.

I wish to thank our writers for their thoughtful and profound words, and to thank Rosemary for her invaluable assistance.

As has always been in the past, the editorial team is immensely thankful for Rod Mummery’s efficient and knowledgeable work as producer of Mark the Word. He possesses infinite calm and graciousness at all stages in the process even when a final draft appears before him with much refining required.

Suzanne Yanko, Editor

Remembering Audrey Joan Larsen

by Wendy Langmore

26 April 2021

It is a privilege for me to have been asked to talk about the life of Audrey Joan Larsen who is a relatively recent friend.

Audrey – or Joan, as she was known in her family – was born in Bundaberg on July 13, 1922, making her not quite 99 when she died. She was one of three, with her brother Bill (1920) and sister Dorothy (1923). Bill's three daughters, the eldest of whom was Beth, have been close to Audrey over the years and cared for her as she got older. Beth kindly sent us photos and information for this eulogy.

In her youth Audrey participated in the Church of England, playing piano for the Sunday School and for her congregation. Her love for the piano was life-long. She enjoyed being able to play at the Albion pub near her home, where the manager Fred had a piano and where she often had meals. For a number of years, she played regularly at an aged care home. She continued to take lessons even until quite recently. Audrey was a great lover of music and a regular at the opera and at classical music concerts. She also loved going to movies with friends.

Audrey's working life revolved around secretarial support, beginning as a junior steno-typist at Wyper Bros, Bundaberg in 1937. During the war she worked for the US Army Office Staff in Brisbane. At one stage she was invited to go to New Guinea, but her father forbade it. Later she moved to Sydney to work as the assistant to the Senior Internal Auditor with the Australian Merchants and Shipowners in Sydney.

She was very skilled at shorthand and enjoyed working as a court reporter for magistrates and judges in law courts here in Australia, as well as in Canada and the UK. She also taught shorthand for a couple of years (1959-60) in Melbourne, for Zercho's Business College. She had lots of funny stories about her experiences with the courts. She eventually bought an apartment in North Melbourne and became a well-known identity in the area.

In Audrey there was warmth, and a concern for community and humanity. She was also very concerned about the environment and wildlife. When heavy transport threatened to engulf North Melbourne residents, she undertook rostered duty with her lecture-board, carefully recording traffic numbers in the busy street in her neighbourhood. The heavy traffic was reduced.

She befriended a lonely neighbour, Omar, a visiting immunologist at a local hospital. Audrey was tempted but finally decided not to accept Omar's pressing invitation to attend his wedding celebrations in Saudi Arabia. And Audrey loved cats, looking after a few strays over the years!

She thoroughly enjoyed travelling and wanted to learn about humankind in other parts of the world: Ceylon, India, Hong Kong, Thailand, USA, Mexico, the UK, France, Slovakia, Canada, Turkey, Noumea, and Fiji were among the visits she made. She had wonderful stories to tell about her travels, which she undertook usually alone, but making friends along the way.

Audrey also loved clothes and shoes and enjoyed dressing with style. She had her favourite boutiques (such as Digby's) and frequently added to her marvellous collection of floating scarves and earrings. A lady with real flair!

Audrey attended this congregation regularly over a period of some 25 years. She made good friends, particularly with Heather Mathew who was her elder for a long time – and who has helped write this eulogy. She enjoyed coming to the evening dinners in the congregation, several at our home.

Early on, she would walk up to church from home and then, later, arrive in her distinctive little banana-yellow car that might be seen by some by some as symbolic of her. Recently, Audrey was proud that her licence was renewed until she was 100. Sadly, she had to give up driving when she broke her hip.

Audrey formed some strong connections within the congregation over the years, as she was a lively conversationalist, being widely read and with a deeply inquiring mind. John had excellent discussions with her about international relations.

That spirit of inquiry led Audrey into formal study in her retirement. She completed a BA in her 70s, and a Diploma in International Relations and a MA in her 80s all at Deakin University. She had a life-long interest in things theological and was well-known at the United Faculty of Theology and Pilgrim College where she audited courses in theology and philosophy, only missing her last class in 'Philosophy for understanding theology' because it was the day she died!

The last year or so of her life was lived relatively quietly at Aarum Aged Care Brunswick where she said she found kind care and support. She was delighted this year when the lockdowns were over and she could go out for lunch and to lectures, driven by her old friend Alexander. We will remember Audrey as a feisty person who lived life to the full to the last.

The following note is the start of a homily delivered in St Paul's Cathedral on Anzac Day this year. The whole address is available via the link below.

“Peace be with you”

by John Langmore

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On Anzac Day we recall with admiration and gratitude the courage and great personal sacrifices of those who served in the wars in which Australia has been involved, and the families who supported them at home. What lessons are there from these terrible events?

Jesus expressed the centrality of peace in his famous Beatitude: 'Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called children of God.' On the day of the Resurrection – the 'cornerstone' day of the church – Jesus came and stood amongst his disciples, and his first words to them were 'Peace be with you' (John 20:19-21).

A vision for peace is expressed repeatedly in the Bible. It is unmissable in Jesus. This is no accident. Love, reconciling love, the overcoming of alienation and hostility, is the very nature, the will, and the activity of God in the world. As Jesus explicitly states, 'the Father and I are one' (John 10:30); one in the love that makes for peace.

Most of us long for peace. Seeking peace is a personal goal. In our democracy, it must be a national goal too, because that is the wish of most voters. Peacebuilding is one aspect of the responsibilities of every person, organisation, government, and church.

Here the mission of the church as embodied in Jesus, and the aspirations of a mainly secular society, coincide and can mutually support one another. ... Seeking peace is therefore a goal for each of us in each aspect of our lives.

In the twentieth century the international framework for peacemaking was gradually improved. ... The horrors of the Second World War led to the negotiation of the United Nations Charter. Article 1 of the Charter states that UN membership commits countries to maintain 'international peace and security'.

Yet many countries are still not implementing the rules to which they committed themselves by joining the UN. The most serious failure is through possession of nuclear weapons. These threaten the survival of humankind. Nuclear weapons are a challenge to God for they have the power to destroy all that God has created in this world.

The International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons, which started here in Melbourne, led negotiation of the Treaty Prohibiting Nuclear Weapons. Australia should sign and ratify that Treaty, as 54 other countries including New Zealand have already done, and advocate that all other countries do the same.

Since the upsurge of violent conflict began a decade ago many countries have been increasing military spending, to its highest peacetime level ever. Australia has doubled military spending during the last decade. Australia is currently participating in an arms race.

Buying more weapons is commonly rationalized as making us safer. But it also motivates a competitor to increase the sophistication of their weapons, and so an arms race begins, reducing everyone's security. If we seriously want to live peaceful lives, military spending must be constrained.

Governments are not adequately conscious of the potential value of professional peacebuilding. Australian diplomatic capacity urgently requires upgrading. The proportion of Commonwealth funding allocated for diplomacy has been halved during the last 25 years.

A striking gap in Australian peacebuilding capacity is the lack of a high quality, well-funded, professional, non-government peace centre. That is why I have been campaigning for such a centre and why the University of Melbourne is establishing a Peacebuilding Initiative. It will become a Centre when sufficient funds are contributed.

Peacebuilding is part of the work of God in the world.

From the Minister

by Craig Thompson

I recently took the opportunity afforded by our current reading of Paul's letter to the Ephesians to reflect on the theme of peace. In a world like ours, the concern for peace is something very much present to us under the surface of most of what we do and experience. The sermon drew attention to the peace we desire and the peace which will surprise us.

Over the next few months, the peace we desire will be present to us as a congregation in our deliberations about our 'next': our next location and shape. This thinking will be about peace: seeking a place which will lend itself to stability and growth and free us for things which have not been possible in the last 14 years.

Yet, we cannot create peace for ourselves. The peace we desire is – according to the gospel – met with a peace which will surprise us. Our best efforts and calculations will reflect what we think ails and so what we think we will need. But we have no guarantees here. God is not part of an equation.

The peace which will surprise us is that, while God is calculable, God is nevertheless ours, or we are God's. This peace comes not from negotiable and strategy but from the gift of an identity. An identity springs from a relation – 'children of God' – and not from secondary things like bank balances, staffing, architecture and street addresses. This identity does not change as we move into a new future even if, one day, we conclude that we moved in the wrong direction. We remain God's people in all things.

This frees us to work together and to decide in openness and love. It makes what we have now – who we have now – as important as those we might imagine having through our careful planning and decision-making. Love, as the goal of this work, is also the means of this work. We seek to love each other into something new.

To consider and weigh, plan and prioritise, is to pray. In this way, we remind God – and ourselves – that the world is not at peace and take up what seems to be our role in setting part of the world back on the path to peace. We look then to see whether God answers our prayer in the way we hoped, or will surprise us with a deeper peace we did not expect.

How might it feel to be in a different location?

by Alan Wilkinson,
MTEF Project Coordinator

Our Congregation is meeting after church on Sunday 18 July to 'try on' and explore what it might 'feel like' to be Mark the Evangelist in various relocation scenarios. This workshop is a

chance to chat together and explore issues, opportunities and possibilities. It is not the occasion to decide on a final location for worship and Hotham Mission management.

What do we expect from our discussions?

1. We will hear each other's hopes and concerns about a move from Curzon Street.
2. We will develop a deeper appreciation of what will be involved in maintaining our treasures, while making the most of the local context and potential opportunities associated with a different future.
3. It may be that some will glimpse a vision of what might be created through a move.
4. Church Council will gain a better sense of how members of the congregation feel about aspects of each scenario. This will help to guide it in preparing a preferred future location for consideration by the Congregation in October.

A range of scenarios have been identified. Discussion of 'feel like' exploratory scenarios to be considered on the 18th will be based on the following three location types:

1. RENT/RENOVATE a building into which we could TRANSFER OUR WORSHIP.
2. RELOCATE as MtE to a location where we could SHARE OUR SPACE.
3. AMALGAMATE with a congregation where we would NOT RETAIN OUR SEPARATE IDENTITY.

We will together explore this series of 'what if' scenarios. Working in small groups, we will 'try on' several to see how they 'fit'. The day will finish with a plenary to hear back from each of the groups and consolidate our discoveries.

The scenarios we will consider are 'imaginary vehicles' through which to explore the issues and opportunities associated with a move to this type of location. The actual path we end up taking may differ in some respects from any of the scenarios we have considered.

It may seem as though we are going over and over these 'future' issues. However, we have made a lot of progress together after deciding that we do not have a future on our site. Once we have clarified what a different future might 'feel like', Finance and Property Committee will draw on these congregational insights and synthesise a small number of specific alternatives as possible future locations for the congregation. Church Council will consider these alternatives in September and make a final recommendation for endorsement at a congregational meeting to be held in October.

In summary, we have been on a long and arduous journey together and have worked our way around some serious dead ends. We now understand that the responsible course of action is to re-locate and we are close to discerning how that might occur. We should not forget that there is a strong "mission" light at the end of the tunnel – and it is now very close.

"Peace be with you" – full text

The full text of John Langmore's homily delivered in St Paul's Cathedral on Anzac Day this year can be found at http://marktheevangelist.unitingchurch.org.au/mtw/peace_be-with_you.pdf



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The Congregation of Mark the Evangelist - North Melbourne