

During our pilgrimage to Israel in September we made a visit to Yad Vashem, the World Holocaust Remembrance Centre.



It's situated on the mount of Remembrance in Jerusalem.

It's a vast site covering many acres with halls and exhibitions. The central museum, is a prism running through the top of the hillside. Our guide described it as deliberately being like a knife in the back, which is how Jewish communities felt as they were abandoned by the countries in which they lived.



When you enter the long triangular museum there are five halls either side of the central walkway and to try and take in the story

of the holocaust you walk this way and that way through each exhibition area, each space powerfully and poignantly telling the story.

The exhibition has a great many artifacts and items on display and monitors on which survivors are telling their story, what happened to them and their families. What happened after the war.

There are large items, like one of the railway trucks used to take people to the camps, there are items of clothing and pictures and the yellow stars Jews had to sew on their clothes.

I'm sure everyone who visits carries with them a sober reminder of the capacity humankind has towards one another. Sadly we don't seem to learn any lessons from the past. A war continues in the Ukraine (and elsewhere) and as Revd Terry was reminding me in the week, since the end of World War Two there has only been a single year when no member of the British armed forces has been killed, 1967.

That isn't to say that armed conflict doesn't also bring heroism, courage, and sacrifice for the good of others. I was reading about John McCrae.



On August 4, 1914, Britain declared war on Germany. Canada, as a member of the British Empire, was automatically at war. Within three weeks, 45,000 Canadians had rushed to join up. John McCrae was among them.

He was brigade-surgeon to the First Brigade of the Canadian Forces Artillery. Just before his departure, he wrote to a friend:

*It is a terrible state of affairs, and I am going because I think every bachelor, especially if he has experience of war, ought to go. I am really rather afraid, but more afraid to stay at home with my conscience.*

John McCrae was right to be afraid, but being afraid doesn't make you a coward, it just means you know something of what might happen. Although he was afraid, he felt he had to do his duty.

In April 1915, John McCrae was in the trenches near Ypres, (EE-Pruh) Belgium, in the area called Flanders. Some of the heaviest fighting of the First World War took place there during that was known as the Second Battle of Ypres.

On April 22, chlorine gas was used against Allied troops in a desperate attempt to break the stalemate. Canadian soldiers fought relentlessly and held the line for another 16 days. In the trenches, John McCrae tended hundreds of wounded soldiers every day. In a letter to his mother, he wrote of the Battle of Ypres.

*The general impression in my mind is of a nightmare. We have been in the most bitter of fights. For seventeen days and seventeen nights none of us have had our clothes off, nor our boots even, except occasionally. In all that time while I was awake, gunfire and rifle fire never ceased for sixty seconds ..... And behind it all was the constant background of the sights of the*

*dead, the wounded, the maimed, and a terrible anxiety lest the line should give way.*

On the 2 May 1915. John discovered that a close friend had been killed and buried nearby with a simple wooden cross marking the grave. Nearby the poppies that grew in that area were beginning to grow. Sitting in the back of an ambulance, staring out at the battle scarred ground, the graves and the Poppies, John McCrae wrote his poem in Flanders Fields.

**IN FLANDERS FIELDS the poppies blow  
Between the crosses row on row,  
That mark our place; and in the sky  
The larks, still bravely singing, fly  
Scarce heard amid the guns below.**

**We are the Dead. Short days ago  
We lived, felt dawn, saw sunset glow,  
Loved and were loved, and now we lie  
In Flanders fields.**

**Take up our quarrel with the foe:  
To you from failing hands we throw  
The torch; be yours to hold it high.  
If ye break faith with us who die  
We shall not sleep, though poppies grow  
In Flanders fields.**

Although the war brought the terrible waste of lives, John believed that those that follow must take up the battle against the foe – but who is our foe? In war the enemy seems clear, but what do we fight against?

We are only four chapters into the bible and bloodshed occurs. In chapter one God creates such a perfect world and creates humankind to live in harmony with each other and with God.

In chapter three we see Adam and Eve disobeying God and sin enters the world. In Chapter four we see what distance from God brings.

Cain is angry with his brother Abel.

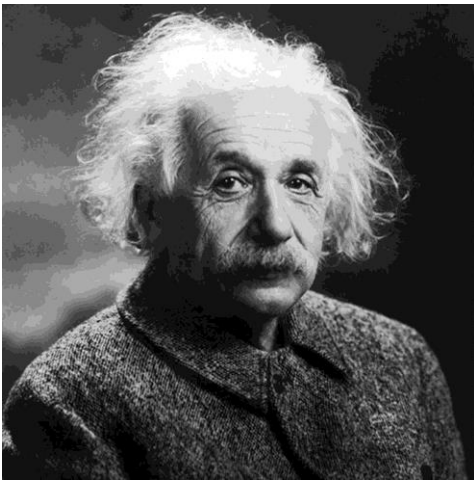
God speaks to Cain

*Then the LORD said to Cain, "Why are you angry? Why is your face downcast? If you do what is right, will you not be accepted?"*

*But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must master it."*

Here is our answer. When humankind is distant from God, does not live according to God's Word – then they do not do what is right. Sin crouches at the door.

Walking around the exhibition at Yad Vashem, one comes up against the blackest of evil, the depth of sin.



The German Jew and Nobel prize-winner Albert Einstein said this

Evil does not exist sir, or at least it does not exist unto itself. Evil is simply the absence of God. It is just like darkness and cold, a word that man has created to describe the absence of God. God did not create evil. Evil is not like faith, or love that exist just as does light and heat. Evil is the result of what happens when man does not have God's love present in his heart. It's like the cold that comes when there is no heat or the darkness that comes when there is no light.

Albert Einstein

The absence of God – sin crouching at the door – evil happens when we do not have God's love in our hearts.

Albert Einstein also said, "The world will not be destroyed by those who do evil, but by those who watch them without doing anything."

We live in peace, a peace bought for us at very considerable cost. The long list of names we read at the memorial is a reminder of the cost of our peace. Some of you may have been reading about the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Falklands War and the cost of liberating the islands.

I seek to live my life as fully as possible, in part to be thankful for the peace I inherit through the sacrifice of others.

But I can't ignore the need of others, or unfairness, or discrimination, or warped justice, or a lack of mercy. You and I are called to live in the light and to take the light of Christ into the dark places.

We are called to live Christ-like lives, because through Christ we have been shown compassion, love, forgiveness and mercy, as our psalm reminded us. As far as the east is from the west, so far has our sin been removed. How then to use our freedom?

Our example is Jesus Christ. As it says in a song we sing from time to time.

This is our God, the servant king  
He calls us now to follow him  
To give our lives as a daily offering  
Of worship too, the servant King.

Every act of kindness, every offer of forgiveness, each time we think and act on the needs of others, we honour Christ, we live in the light and we live in the freedom that is ours.



Yad Vashem is a stark reminder of what happens when those who could do something refuse to act. The children's memorial is a hollowed out cavern where candles are infinitely reflected to create the impression of millions of stars. As one walks through this darkened space voices are reading the names of the 1.5 million Jewish children murdered in the last war.

You know how long it takes us to read our memorial lists. Imagine how long it takes to read through 1.5 million names.

Today is a sombre reminder of the fight against tyranny and evil. The cost of our freedom and a day of gratitude and thanksgiving for the peace we enjoy.

Let our response be to commit ourselves to compassion, love, forgiveness and mercy. And to give our lives in the service of Christ and his coming kingdom.

**Revd. Jon Hutchinson, 13/11/22**