

Remembrance 2019

They will beat their swords into plowshares
and their spears into pruning hooks.
Nation will not take up sword against nation,
nor will they train for war anymore.

You have probably heard that scripture before at a
Remembrance service, swords into plowshares.

Intellectually, I know what it means...to take the weapons
of war which bring death and destruction and turn them
into agricultural tools that will bring life and wellbeing.

But I have no first hand experience and I'm not sure many
of you will either – unless you took fencing as a sport
option at school.

The only swords I know about are from watching films.

Remember Errol Flynn? He made a few swashbuckling
films in his day. One Christmas my primary school showed
us an episode of "The Flashing Blade" which was a French
children's TV series. We all ran out into the playground
and pretended to have sword fights.

If you are a fan of Tolkien's Lord of the Rings you will
know that there are famous swords with their own names,
most famous of all is Narsil; the broken sword of Isildur
that Elrond re-forged for Aragorn and named Anduril.

That's it – that's my knowledge of swords.

And I'm sure we all know what a plough does but have we
any farmers? I used to live at Chester and behind our

house were fields and the farmer would plough them up
and the fresh earth was turned over into long furrows.

Until I looked it up, I didn't know the plowshare is a part
of the whole plough assembly, it helps turn the soil over
into a neat furrow.

This year though I came across something that captures
the spirit of that scripture; the idea of turning weapons to
something more useful.

I was on a Pilgrimage to Israel and my friend who was
leading the trip wanted us to visit the Golan Heights.

This is a high rocky mountainous area overlooking the
plains of Syria. I knew it was disputed territory but on the
way there on the coach the guide commented that this
land we were driving through used to be Syria which
alerted my interest.

The Golan heights were captured by Israel in the 6 day
war in 1967 and they have administered the territory
since 1981. It's still be argued over, not least because on
25th March this year President Trump stated that the
Golan was a part of Israel, but the 28 nations of the
European Union don't recognise it as such. So the conflicts
linger on.

There is a visitor centre – a café really, for tourists like me
and these two photographs show the trenches and gun
emplacements and are a stark reminder of the fighting
and the conflict.

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But on the road leading up to this highest point – our view point, were these strange creatures made out of bits of old metal.



Someone with a quirky imagination had taken bits of tank and jeep and field gun – the machinery of battle and made sculptures and this for me captured the spirit of Isaiah's words, swords into ploughshares.

Art in all its forms can speak loudly and the sculptures brought alive the desire for peace...because the nature of the original purpose, (a shock absorber or a pinion or whatever) was still visible but was now something else...something...fun.

Much though as we regret all war and the suffering it brings, we cannot overlook that is also a place of honour, and courage, sacrifice and duty, loyalty and comradeship and heroic deeds.

When I visit Dormy house each month for a communion service I usually pop in on John Churchill, a local man some of you will know, a former golf club member. He had a stroke and both he and his wife are at Dormy. With the surname Churchill, I asked him about family connections and he told me he wasn't connected to Winston Churchill but was related to Mad Jack Churchill.

There is an article about him on Wikipedia and it says this.

John Malcolm Thorpe Fleming Churchill, [DSO](#) & [Bar](#), [MC](#) & Bar (16 September 1906 – 8 March 1996), was a [British Army officer](#) who fought in the [Second World War](#) with a [longbow](#), [bagpipes](#), and a [Scottish broadsword](#).

Nicknamed "**Fighting Jack Churchill**" and "**Mad Jack**", he was known for the motto: "Any officer who goes into action without his sword is improperly dressed."

If you thought the days of fighting with swords was in the far distant history, not so for Jack Churchill. In Norway, in Italy he would lead the way with his sword round his waist and bagpipes under his arm.

This annual festival invites us to reflect on the loss and suffering and we read the long list of names of those from this parish who lives were lost, but also on the character and achievement of those who fought.

I was glad to learn about John's relative and also to help the year 6 class from the primary school in what they have been learning. They have been doing a topic on World War 1 and as part of that they came down to the war memorial and into the church and churchyard to make discoveries.

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I have to say they were impeccably behaved and a credit to the school and their parents.

It was fascinating and quite moving to see the children discover new facts and start to appreciate more of what this all means.

They realised that the names on the plaques are also on the stones but are now faded and worn away...you can still just about make out some names on the stone work. But remembering is important...so new plaques have been made.

It was poignant to hear the children as they realised some surnames were the same and realise that the same family lost more than one person.

They read aloud the words carved round the memorial and wrote them down and then we went up to the graveyard where they discovered the war graves. They also had been learning about the VC and could tell me about it...so I took them over to where Ferdinand West is buried and let them discover that on his headstone are those two letters...VC.

The children came down during a coffee morning and came to the servery at the back for a drink and I showed them the plaque on the wall and they looked through the same names there as there are on the memorial.

They spotted there a name at the bottom, Helen Peel and wanted to know about her...which I could help them with as there is another plaque to her and her brother near the North Transept.

Helen Maud Peel, motor ambulance unit died on December 13th 1917 aged 22.

I believe it is important that the children learn about the two world wars and other conflicts and why we have Remembrance. In part we honour the names of those whose lives were lost when we teach a new generation.

But there is another discovery to be made. Our two mini parables have discovery at their heart.

People used to bury their treasure to keep it safe. A man finds a treasure hoard in a field and goes and buys the field so he can own it.

A merchant finds a pearl of such unsurpassable beauty and value he sells everything he has just to own it.

What can be SO valuable that its discovery means you must have it, must own it?

Peace. Freedom. Joy. Forgiveness. These are the hallmarks of God's kingdom won for us through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

His death and resurrection are the means of God's grace and forgiveness to a world that sadly, is often in conflict and where the remembrance of war is everywhere.

If freedom is ours, if forgiveness and peace and joy can be ours, how then should we live?

Surely we honour the memory of those who lost their lives by cherishing the freedom that is ours. At the very least – in the election we should vote.

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And we take note that Jesus said – I have come that they may have life abundantly.

Living life abundantly, freely, graciously, kindly...isn't this what Christ offers? This is the life of those who discover the kingdom of heaven is near.

Before we sing again...lets' take heed of Psalm 46 and be still and be silent acknowledging God who is sovereign over all, who one day will bring all wars to cease.