

Today is the fourth Sunday of Easter.

It is often referred to as Good Shepherd Sunday because every year on this Sunday the Gospel reading comes from John, chapter 10, where Jesus uses the imagery of shepherd and sheep to refer to himself and those he has come to serve and save.

So, in our gospel reading this morning, we hear Jesus say,

"I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep".

So, today is Good Shepherd Sunday.

But in our civil calendar today is also ANZAC Day,

that day when we remember those who have died in war in the service of this country.

And, coincidentally perhaps, the readings for Good Shepherd Sunday have particular resonance on this day of remembrance.

The writer of the First Letter of John says,

We know love by this, that [Jesus] laid down his life for us--and we ought to lay down our lives for one another."

And, then, as we have just heard, in our Gospel reading Jesus says,

"I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep."

And so we have these themes of selflessness, of sacrifice, of friendship and self-giving love.

And those themes resonate strongly with us today as we remember family members and friends who served in the armed forces and lost their lives during the conflicts of this century and the last.

We remember people who gave their lives for the good of those around them,

people who made the ultimate sacrifice for their friends, their comrades, their country, and in the service of their conscience and their most treasured ideals.

It is fitting that we should remember them and honour their actions and their service.

Our remembrance on this day, however, is two-fold.

We remember those who have died in war in the service of their country.

And that is a remembrance that has us looking back in time to the wars and conflict of our age,

a remembrance that calls to mind our losses,

the loss of our loved ones, the destruction of places and communities, the loss of opportunities for a different future for people and their communities.

We also, however, have a remembrance that has us looking forward to a time when such losses will only be a thing of the past,

when there will be no more war,

no more violence,

no more suffering,

no more desolation,

no more fear,

and no more grief and loss.

when all that was lost and injured will be healed and made whole.

And this remembrance is the remembrance of our faith.

As followers of Jesus, as witnesses to his death and resurrection, we confess a faith that has us hoping for a future that is different from our past.

a future that involves nothing less than the remaking of the world,

a "new heavens and a new earth", says the Book of Revelation,

where every tear will be wiped away and "Death will be no more [and] mourning and crying and pain will be no more"

(Rev 21:4)

This is the same hope expressed by the prophets Isaiah and Micah, when they look toward a time when "swords will be turned into ploughshares and nations will not learn war anymore".

These are the promises of God made known to us most fully in the resurrection of Jesus from the dead.

And they are promises for the whole community of God's creation.

In our gospel reading today, Jesus says,

"I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep."

And then he goes on to say,

"I have other sheep that do not belong to this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd."

And so we proclaim Jesus Christ, crucified and risen, as the saviour not just of a select few,

not of one group or nation at the expense of another,  
but as saviour of the whole world,  
the whole community of God's creation.

The love of God revealed to us in Jesus is bigger than the vested interests of any one nation,

or the aims of any particular dogma or ideology.

In Jesus, God is reconciling the whole world to God's self.

So today, it is indeed fitting to honour all those who gave their lives in the service of this country,

to remember them and grieve their loss.

But it is also fitting and appropriate and necessary to grieve the divisions of this world and to acknowledge that our notions of what is good and right and just are but fragmentary glimpses of the world that is to come.

But that world is coming.

The resurrection of Jesus is the promise of its coming.

And so too is every act of kindness and compassion and mercy, as fleeting or fragmentary as they may be,

every act of forgiveness and reconciliation,  
every act of generosity and love.  
These things are the work of God among us,  
the promise of God's good future that is even now coming to pass.