

## AN ANZAC REFLECTION

Each year in the 50's at AGHS over 800 girls would assemble on the tennis courts to commemorate ANZAC. There was total respect for the occasion and after we all sang the School Hymn and God Save the Queen, it was my responsibility to put the needle on the recording of the Last Post and the Reveille. It all left a deep impression on me, and years later I would meet my Matric. Class at the dawn service on North Terrace and later go with them to the Pancake Kitchen for breakfast.

On the face of it, for Christians to relate deeply to ANZAC Day is rather perplexing. ANZAC is about war, and in every respect wars are a disaster. They presuppose that some people are expendable – a dreadful sign of human failure. Wars may seem to legitimate hatred but to defend one's country and people against an opponent is sometimes justified yet always tragic. ANZAC Day is a stark day and so is Christianity. Jesus died during an army occupation.

Over 100 years ago thousands of Australian men waded ashore in a distant land and were engulfed in an 8 month nightmare of bullets, blood and bodies. Many of these, not well-trained or experienced soldiers, had gone seeking adventure but instead found themselves knee-deep in death and dysentery. Maybe the first disciples followed Jesus in the hope of an adventure and later found themselves knee-deep in religious politics and the death of their leader. The Aussie men saw the abandonment of the whole poorly executed campaign. The first century fishermen lived to see their calling expand and grow into an holy army.

Why is it that we Aussies hold ANZAC Day as the most important day on our national calendar? It was a military defeat with enormous cost. Somehow this event, and the myths that surround it have captured our imaginations. According to some, it was on the shores of Gallipoli that we were formed as a nation: here the nation's spirit and character was distilled and defined. Here were exhibited our national qualities of resourcefulness. *resilience, courage, mateship, sacrifice, generosity and a fair go for all... along with the good cheer and disdain for authority. We Aussies don't like being told what to do.*

Some historians note that this picture was largely a propaganda tool. History is never a simple recording of facts; it's always a reconstruction, an interpretation. History is never something simple, it is always open to debate. For example, it edited out, until recently, the role of Aboriginal men who enlisted. Women in service were largely unrecognized even in their war work as military nurses.

The Gospel of Jesus concerned itself with all humanity, being aware of Jewish history while not denying the cost of taking up their cross which meant being willing to die to what they wanted and to live as Jesus did – always in touch with his Heavenly Father and aware of the needs of others. Our gospel today

pens Jesus' immortal words, 'I give you a new commandment that you love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples.'

Similarly to the ANZAC story, the first disciples like the troops, were uneducated, un-credentialed ordinary blokes. I love this poem by the WW1 Padre Woodbine Willie so called because of the fags he rolled for his men.

#### TEMPTATION

'Pray! Have I prayed! When I'm worn with all  
my praying!  
When I've bored the blessed angels with my  
battery of prayer!  
It's the proper thing to say – but it's only saying,  
saying,  
And I cannot get to Jesus for the glory of her hair.'

The reason why the murder of Jesus is important is not only because of what he meant but on account of who he was. He said either you choose life, Jesus, or you choose death, the power of evil. He also asks us again whether we truly love him, 'Do you really, seriously, as a grown-up and often scared person, believe in loving me enough to stake your life on it?'

ANZAC day, the most famous secular festival, is a day when we are challenged to choose to be lavish in compassion and love as against the pitilessness of death. The speechifying is necessary, and the patriotism and convivial drinking. But the call to true citizenship and care of each other remains as both the challenge and the trophy.

Jesus said, 'Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.' (John 15.13) Jesus did, those women and men in war continue to do so even as 330 Ausn. troops left this week for Iraq to fight against IS. We are invited to be part of that great army of believers who live and die for Christ and each other.

May we answer God's call today. AMEN

rdb.Cummins.24/04/16



