

Sermon to St James' Church, King Street, Sydney

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Rector of St James

Anzac Sunday Evensong

29 April 2018

Readings: Psalm 46; Micah 4: 1-4; Romans 5: 1-8.

The Gallipoli Campaign

The Gallipoli campaign was a failure at the strategic level of warfare, satisfactory at the operational level, and well done at the tactical level. By this, I mean that the political strategy was flawed because of inadequate planning and lack of clear purpose, and there were problems in how the plan was executed by the military leaders, but what was achieved on the ground by the troops was performed with courage and audacity.

The campaign is a good case study because it demonstrates the four traditional phases of war operation, being:

1. The **advance to contact** – by which troops are moved into a position to engage with the enemy,
2. The **attack** – being the bridgehead along the Gallipoli peninsula,
3. The **defence** – which included the troops digging in and repelling the counter-attacks of the Turkish army, and finally
4. The **withdrawal** – in this case being a defeat, but perhaps one of the best executed phases of the whole operation.

It also needs to be noted that war is undertaken within a military culture that often seeks to de-humanise the enemy, that boasts of one's own military prowess, and is based on some sort of moral authority created through political, social and religious legitimisation. Moreover, propaganda plays an important part in this process, which means that the claims and boasts are always open to question.

Moreover, the battlefield is a dangerous place. Major General William Throsby Bridges was the senior Australian commander at Gallipoli and was known for taking risks in moving around the area of operations – a practice then known as 'exposing yourself to the enemy' to encourage subordinates. On 15 May 1915, while visiting some forward trenches and despite advice not to do it, he stepped outside the dugout he was in and was shot by a sniper, dying of his wounds several days later. No one is spared on the battlefield and Bridges death was a great loss to the Australian leadership.

The Anzac Legend

As you are aware, I recently travelled to Gallipoli with our Choir as part of its contribution to the Anzac Day commemorations. This was the first time that I was able to see for myself the place that has been so influential upon our national story.

War historian Charles Bean was firstly a journalist who reported on the progress of the war, and who later created a narrative about it in his *History of the First World War*. His writings have a touch of propaganda about them, but they are nevertheless extensive and detailed. Bean created the *Anzac Legend* – a myth that for much of our history has been defining of what it is to be an Australian. Finally, his accounts provided an ability to develop an understanding of what happened, both for the war-time civilian ‘back home’ and later generations. His account of the landing begins;

“At 0500HRS, three platoons of the leading company of the 7th Battalion set off in four of the ship’s boats. As they moved away in the dim light, the Company Commander, Major Jackson, could see the flashes of shells and rifles to their front. Approaching the shore, the men caught the sound of firing; to their right they could see shells bursting over the boats of the Battalion. Ahead they saw rifle and machine-gun fire cutting up the water.” (C E W Bean, *The Story of Anzac*)

Bean’s narrative comes alive when one stands on the beach where the assault took place. It is poignant to feel the cold breeze of dawn whilst scanning the dark horizon to see the emerging features of the Sphinx and Russell’s Top; or go around to Anzac Cove and Shrapnel Gully and climb the track to Lone Pine, and on to Quinn’s Post and the Nek - place-names that are imprinted on Australian military history.

It is likewise moving to stand quietly in the many small cemeteries scattered over the landscape, and at one find the grave of John Simpson Kirkpatrick – the stretcher-bearer with the donkey. These soldiers too have become part of our national story and their names are engraved on city, town and village memorials across our land from Albany to Cooktown; but to what end?

Unfortunately, because of the failure to remember the lessons of history coupled with a burning desire for retribution, the armistice of the First World War led to the Second World War. And out of the Second World War and the political divisions of the mid-twentieth century came the Cold War and its localised manifestations in Eastern Europe, Cuba, Korea and Vietnam. Today, we have the clash of political and religious ideologies being worked out principally in the Middle-east, North Africa, South-east Asia, and now in many parts of the Western world.

Conflict and violence continues around us and we seem to be slow to learn; often seeking to find enemies where there are none and demonising those who are different from us.

Soldiering and Sacrifice

The psychological consequences of war indicate that violence has an ongoing negative impact on both those involved in it and the wider community. Former US Marine commander and psychologist, David Grossman, wrote a book titled *On Killing*. In it he described the natural human resistance to killing another human, and of both the devastating effects on soldiers in doing so. When this situation became obvious to commanders, the military adjusted the psychological aspects of its training to help soldiers overcome resistance to killing when required, but the cost of this is high.

The fact is that we, as a community, must live with the ongoing effects of war through the psychological disturbance of what is called ‘battle stress’ or ‘post-traumatic stress disorder’ on those involved. This is an indicator that the high human cost is both profound and lasting, extending to the families and communities that have lost loved ones – even to subsequent generations.

While violence is part of the human condition, its effect is ultimately destructive in every conceivable way. History has taught us that those who forget the past are doomed to repeat its failures, even in our own times.

But back to Gallipoli. The inscription on Simpson’s grave reads: ‘he gave his life that others may live’. This a common sentiment regarding those who have died in war. They went, they served, some died, and we the subsequent generations have benefited from what they did through no effort of our own. Because of its proximity to Easter, Anzac Day often finds some resonance with the Easter theme of self-sacrifice.

Ancient sacrifice was about appeasement or ‘making things right’ between humanity and God and thereby seeking God’s favour; but this is not what is happening in war. On the other hand, the death of Jesus was more than appeasement because it was an act of self-giving for the sake of humanity. It is at this point that the idea of sacrifice in war finds some parallel. Hence, ‘he gave his life that others may live’.

Of course, the death of Jesus was also meant to be the end of sacrifice – certainly from the appeasement perspective. Christianity ushered in a post-sacrifice world because God said, ‘enough is enough’! In our Eucharistic worship we look back at the sacrifice of Jesus and remind ourselves that we no longer require such sacrifice for our benefit.

Salvation is therefore the opportunity to live in peace and security under the rule of God. The Prophet Micah’s vision in this regard was that the nations ‘*shall beat their swords into ploughshares, and their spears into pruning-hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore*’ (Micah 4: 3). Nevertheless, we know that we still fail to be the people that God wants us to be and that war is a shocking reminder of this failure at a communal level. What are we to do to become people of peace?

Becoming People of Peace

The Godly response to brokenness is to seek reconciliation. This requires us to be honest with ourselves, admit our wrong-doing and seek forgiveness, so that we may live in peace once more. This process can be very powerful because of its capacity to restore relationships and allow people to move on to a new way of being.

We recognise reconciliation in our worship through the confession, but there are also significant secular expressions of it down through history and across cultures; such as the Peace of Westphalia at the end of the European Wars of Religion, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission at the end of apartheid regime in South Africa, the Melanesian reconciliation process in Solomon Islands and Bougainville, and the process of restorative justice in the administration of the law.

The Australian War Memorial in Canberra is our principal national sacred space for the remembrance of those who served and died in war. Few people, however are aware that of the various memorials located down Anzac Parade in front of the Memorial, the closest one commemorates Mustafa Kemal Atatürk and the Turkish army that defended its lands in the First World War – that is a memorial to a former enemy. I think that this situation is unique in the world.

This Turkish Memorial (along with an Australian one at Gallipoli) has etched upon it those gracious words attributed to Atatürk and directed to his former enemies:

*"Those heroes that shed their blood and lost their lives...
You are now lying in the soil of a friendly country. Therefore rest in peace.
There is no difference between the Johnnies and the Mehmets
to us where they lie side by side here in this country of ours...
You, the mothers, who sent their sons from faraway countries
wipe away your tears; your sons are now lying in our bosom and are in peace,
after having lost their lives on this land they have become our sons as well."*

(Ataturk, 1934)

These are powerful words of reconciliation that seek to humanise one's former foes, distributes moral authority broadly (well beyond one's religion, nation or tribe), and does not apportion blame. Indeed, they recognise our common humanity and brokenness, along with a desire for peace, thereby opening up the possibility of forgiveness. Reflecting God's gracious actions toward us, they are a good addition to the Anzac Legend.

Lest we forget...