

Remember! (Nov 6th, 2016)

Habakkuk 1:1-4 and 2:1-4. Micah 4:1-5

Every day, news reports show pictures of slaughter, poison gas, terrified people, refugee camps and more. As I drove to work on Tuesday I listened to the CBC report from Iraq:

About 50,000 Iraq forces, assisted by US coalition have been involved in an operation since Oct 17th, to recapture the city of Mosul, and to drive out ISIS militants from their last major urban stronghold in the country. After a dawn assault on Monday, the forces retook the last village on Mosul's eastern outskirts. There was celebration in the streets as civilians saw freedom on the horizon. But that freedom comes at a cost.

In the last few weeks, ISIS militants have killed hundreds of people. A United Nations human rights spokesperson said on Friday that 1,600 people from the northern town of Hamman have been transported by the militants to Mosul to be used as human shields against air strikes. Men, women and children. Residents of Hamman have also been forced to hand over their children, especially boys above the age of nine, in an apparent recruitment drive for child soldiers. Hundreds of civilians have been killed or taken hostage. Columns of armored vehicles push through dirt berms, drawing heavy fire going through a warren of dense buildings prone to booby traps and ambushes. The unsung heroes are the men driving the bulldozers. They are sent in quickly to destroy the wildly complicated network of ISIS underground tunnels that are often rigged with powerful explosives.

Meanwhile, more than 1 million civilians are still stuck in the city, terrified to come out of their homes for fear of flying shrapnel and missiles. A further 21,000 people have fled to already crowded shelters, and the UN has warned that the number is likely to increase to up to 1.5 million people needing emergency shelter.

ALL of this happened less than one week ago. And it is STILL happening as we meet today to 'Remember'. It has a sickening resemblance to Farley Mowat's memoir of WWII entitled "And No Bird Sang." His story opens our heart to the

brutality of both World Wars. A brutality and a chaos of hell that really did happen and continues to happen right now, every day.

On Remembrance Day, we hear the words “We will remember.” But in my heart, I say “We MUST remember.” We must break down the protective wall of numbness that we have towards war. We cannot and we should not take our safety here in Canada for granted, while just 9000 km away there is a terrifying war that is all too familiar to the sights and sounds of WWII. We must be spurred to action.

But what can we do?

72 years ago our Canadian soldiers fought for the freedom and liberation of people that they did not know. They did not just fight for Canada. They fought for people in Holland, France, Spain, Denmark, Poland, and more. They fought for people of all religions and all races and nationalities. They gave their lives to end the forces of hatred and greed. They fought for world of peace.

What has happened to us in the last 72 years?

How did that hate and greed, and struggle for power return so prominently? Why do we hear people complain about “those foreigners” – “their strange religious customs” – “they take our jobs” – “they bring violence and terrorism to our country.”

And even if we would never say these things out loud ourselves, sometimes we remain silent when others do.

What can we do?

We cannot singlehandedly stop all wars that are happening, but we can follow in Jesus’ footsteps. We can bring healing and love to the individuals we encounter. We can be a channel of peace. The prophet Habakkuk called to God for help when he saw the destruction all around him. We too can ask God to open our minds, so that we will be able to hear our own thoughts, words and actions when they unintentionally express greed, hate and bigotry. Like Habakkuk, we can ask for God’s help. We don’t want to have a single thought that will add to the relentless war machine growing in our world. And we can step up and express our concern when we hear words that stereotype others as useless, unworthy, or as

the enemy. We can pray for change in ourselves and in our responses. We can be a channel of God's peace.

When the prophet Habakkuk cried out to God:

"How long must we wait for peace ... save us from the violence, the hatred, the destruction ..."

And God answered:

"Write the vision: make it plain on tablets ... For there is still a vision ... If it seems to tarry, wait for it. It will surely come ..."

Yes, on this Remembrance Day, we MUST remember the vision for peace.

It is the vision that the prophet Micah foretells in our reading today.

A vision where:

*"Nations will never again go to war, never prepare for battle again.
Everyone will live in peace" (Micah 4:3-4)*

It is the vision that the brave soldiers had as they sacrificed their lives so many years ago.

It is the vision that our military peace keeping forces still have today as they work in Iraq, Syria, Yemen and many other places around the world, to bring justice and equality.

It is the vision that we can have. A vision of Peace. A vision that we can be part of. Help us live it.