

GLASGOW UNITARIAN CHURCH

SERVICE ON SUNDAY 9th November 2014

Prelude (Stephen)

Welcome (Iain)

Light Chalice (in silence and to be chosen)

Two Minutes Silence (Margaret)

We shall now have two minutes silence as is the custom in November to remember those who worked fought and died in world Wars One and Two Minutes

Opening Words (Margaret)

During this service we would also like to remember all who conscientiously struggled. some of whom died, in the belief that others might have a better future without war. Let us keep in our thoughts the civilians who are still being damaged and die in all warfare and those volunteers working for humanitarian causes at home and abroad. And let us spare some thoughts for children present and future. And finally, let us give thought to those members of this congregation who are not with us this morning through illness or feebleness of age and to those of past days who have meant much to us through their commitment to liberal religious principles.

Let us remember them All.

(Margaret) Stand for first Hymn (Purple) 181 Wake Now My Senses

Wake, now, my senses, and hear the earth call;
feel the deep power of being in all;
keep with the web of creation your vow,
giving, receiving as love shows us how.

Wake, now, my reason, reach out to the new;
join with each pilgrim who quests for the true;
honour the beauty and wisdom of time;
suffer thy limit, and praise the sublime.

Wake, now, compassion, give heed to the cry;
voices of suffering fill the wide sky;
take as your neighbour both stranger and friend,
praying and striving their hardship to end.

Wake, now, my conscience, with justice thy guide;
join with all people whose rights are denied;
take not for granted a privileged place;
God's love embraces the whole human race.

Wake, now, my vision of ministry clear;
brighten my pathway with radiance here;
mingle my calling with all who would share;
work toward a planet transformed by our care.

Meditation/Prayer (Margaret)

Apart from natural disasters and diseases to which we attach no moral judgement, War remains the greatest evil to humankind. Let us in our meditation/prayer consider ways that we could abolish War and if that were achieved what benefits there could be to humanity should all the governments and rulers of the world work together for Peace and think of warring no more.

SILENCE

Reading – Plato – Margaret

Allegory of the Cave Republic Book 7 (note the gender used)

(Socrates is conversing with a friend)

‘Then after this,’ I said, ‘liken our nature in its education and want of education to a condition which I may thus describe. Picture men in an underground cave-dwelling, with a long entrance reaching up towards the light along the whole width of the cave; in this they lie from their childhood, their legs and neck in chains, so that, they stay where they are and look only in front of them, as the chain prevents their turning their heads round. Some way off, and higher up, a fire is burning behind them, and between the fire and the prisoners is a road on higher ground. Imagine a wall built along this road, like the screen which showmen have in front of the audience, over which they show the puppets.’

‘I have it,’ he said.

‘Then picture also men carrying along this wall all kinds of articles which overtop it, statues of men and other creatures in stone and wood and other materials; naturally some of the carriers are speaking, others are silent.’

‘A strange image and strange prisoners.’ he said.

‘They are like ourselves,’ I answered. ‘For in the first place do you think that such men would have seen anything of themselves or of each other except the shadows thrown by the fire on the wall of the cave opposite to them?’

‘How could they,’ he said, ‘if all their life they had been forced to keep their heads motionless?’

‘What would they have seen of the things carried along the wall? Would it not be the same?’

‘Surely.’

‘Then if they were able to talk with one another, do you not think that they would suppose that what they saw to be the real things?’

‘Necessarily.’

'Then what if there were in their prison an echo from the opposite wall?
When any one of those passing by spoke, do you imagine that they
could help thinking that the voice came from the shadow passing before
them?'

'No, certainly not,' he said.

'Then most assuredly', I said, 'the only truth that such men would
conceive would be the shadows of those manufactured articles?'.....

'Let us suppose one of them released, and forced suddenly to stand up
and turn his head, and walk and look towards the light. Let us suppose
that all these actions gave him pain, and that he was too dazed to see
the objects whose shadows he had been watching before. What do you
think he would say if he were told by someone that before he had been
seeing mere foolish phantoms.....?'

Second Hymn (Green) 198 For the Healing of the Nations

For the healing of the nations,

God, we pray with one accord

**For a just and equal sharing
Of the things that earth affords.**

To a life of love and action

Help us rise and pledge our word,

Help us rise and pledge our word.

Lead us ever into freedom

From despair your world release;

That, redeemed from war and hatred,

All may come and go in peace.

Show us how through care and goodness

Fear will die and hope increase

Fear will die and hope increase.

All that kills abundant living

Let it from the earth depart;

Pride of status, race or schooling

Dogmas keeping us apart.

May our common quest for justice

Be our brief life's hallowed art

Be our brief life's hallowed art.

Readings from the War Poets of 1914 – 18

The nation has been encouraged to commemorate especially the beginning of the Great War:

These three readings dwell on the Horrors of that First World War:

1. Anthem for Doomed Youth by Wilfred Owen (1893-1918)

Few words about the poet- Wilfred Owen was born in Shropshire. During World War One he suffered concussion and trench fever and was sent to recuperate near Edinburgh, where he met the poet Siegfried Sassoon. He recovered and was posted back to the front. He died in action a few days before the Armistice was signed.

ANTHEM FOR DOOMED YOUTH

What passing-bells for those who die like cattle?
Only the monstrous anger of the guns.
Only the stuttering rifles' rapid rattle
Can patter out their hasty orisons.
No mockeries now for them; no prayers or bells,
Nor any voice of mourning save the choirs,
The shrill demented choirs of wailing shells;
And bugles calling them from sad shires.

What candles may be held to speed them all?
Not in the hands of boys, but in their eyes
Shall shine the holy glimmers of goodbyes.
The pallor of girls' brows shall be their pall;
Their flowers the tenderness of patient minds,
And each slow dusk a drawing-down of blinds.

2. Survivors by Siegfried Sassoon (1886-1967)

Few words about the poet - Siegfried Sassoon, poet and novelist, was born in Kent. His experiences in World War One led him to detest all war evident from his poems and writings.

SURVIVORS

No doubt they'll soon get well; the shock and strain
Have caused their stammering, disconnected talk.
Of course they're "longing to go out again,"--
These boys with old, scarred faces, learning to walk,
They'll soon forget their haunted nights; their cowed
Subjection to the ghosts of friends who died,--

Their dreams that drip with murder; and they'll be proud
Of glorious war that shattered all their pride...
Men who went out to battle, grim and glad;
Children, with eyes that hate you, broken and mad.

3. Testament of Youth by Vera Brittain (1893-1970) Preface by Shirley Williams
(1930-)

Few words about the author - Vera Brittain and her daughter Shirley Williams

Vera Brittain was a pacifist. She was prolific as a speaker, lecturer, journalist and
writer

Shirley Williams, daughter of Vera Brittain, studied at Oxford, became a journalist
before entering politics and although now living in the USA maintains her connection
with British politics.

In the preface to the 1978 edition of Testament of Youth Shirley
Williams writes:

“My own picture of the WAR was gleaned from my mother. Her life, like that of so
many of her contemporaries who were actually in the fighting or dealing with its
consequences, was shaped by it and shadowed by it. It was hard for her to laugh
unconstrainedly; at the back of her mind the row upon row of wooden crosses were
planted too deeply. Through her, I learned how much courage it took to live on in
service to the world when all those one loved best were gone: her fiance first, her
best friend, her beloved only brother.....”

My mother became a life-long pacifist. I still remember her in her seventies.
determinedly sitting in a CND demonstration and being gently removed by the police.
Testament of Youth is, I think, the only book about the FIRST WORLD WAR written
by a woman.....It is an autobiography and also an elegy for a generation.”(Virago
Press)

Address

Reflections on War and Peace (Iain)

Reflections on War and Peace

When Neville Chamberlain, prime minister of Britain and scion of a well -
known Unitarian family, famously stepped off the plane from Munich in
1938 and waved his piece of paper with Adolf Hitler's signature on it and
pronounced “Peace in our time”, that peace may have seemed possible
to the yearners for peace but it was only useful in so far as it bought time
for the re-armament of Britain for the war to come.

The last time I led worship on Remembrance Sunday I was so personal and emotional that I upset some people. This time I will be wholly impersonal and analytical.

Is permanent universal peace possible? We may yearn for it, and, better, work for it, but is it possible and, even if it is possible, is it desirable?

There are several features of what we think we know about *homo sapiens* that may suggest that the answer to both of these questions might be “No”.

The first problem is our evolutionary heritage and the ancestors in the family of great apes with whom we share more than ninety percent of our genes. In the Upper Pleistocene, called the stone age we were hunters and gatherers for more than thirty million years. That means we have a long history of killing and, as the trainers of boy soldiers know, there is only a mild inbuilt inhibition against killing each other, so weak that it can be overcome in most people. We are not just killers we are potentially the killed. The old soldiers from the trenches told me as a boy “if you are faced with an enemy you believe are intending to kill you, and speaking to him is impossible, then you either die or kill first”. I believed them then and I still believe them now. – *homo lupus homini*, “man the wolf of man” is the old Latin saying

The second problem is not genetic but developmental. Our inbuilt tribalism originates not just from the genes of our species but also from the development of each individual. Controversially within religious circles, but not within psychological circles, I am going to argue here that the fatal flaw in human nature might be our absolutely incurable tribalism which has its roots in what is commonly called love, familial love.

There are good grounds for thinking that that tribalism has its roots in the developmental history of every single one of us. The psychologists who study attachment record that right from our very first days we and those of us who are lucky enough to have adequately functioning mothers are forming bonds of loyalty based on mutual satisfaction. Not just breast feeding but all forms of care bring important satisfactions to both mother and infant. This is certainly not wholly instinctive on the mother's part but once the initial bonding has taken place (and that is partly a learning process for both parties) the infant has truly joined a tribe – the mother's tribe and not necessarily the father's. For that infant that relationship is a matter of life and death and its greatest fear is of abandonment, especially physical abandonment, but also psychological abandonment or rejection. As time goes on some of this intensity can be farmed out to grandparents, fathers, syblings, nannies or child-minders - and thus diluted. But all these mentors are normally members of the young person's tribe. The more the young person is securely bonded to them or in other language "learns to love them", the more he or she absorbs their view of life, their way of relating to other people, their fears and loves, their ideas about other tribes. This relationship to other tribes may begin with the neighbours or with feared others, perhaps even the police or the Social Work department. But the better the child relates (loves) the more surely it absorbs, is nurtured and supported, the more surely, along with that, come all the family's tribal hatreds, obvious and dramatic or muted and suppressed. (Children are not fooled).

We share this with many animals - most obviously with the primates.

As children make their first relations with their syblings and peers and join their own age group at school outside the home, they bond increasingly with a wider range of others but the basic patterns of

relationship in infancy are retained and built on and the basic attitudes to others, strangers and friends, are not so much changed as built upon. With adolescence the group of age-mates or peers becomes increasingly more important. Acceptance in a group is now as essential to psychological survival and perhaps even physical survival as acceptance by the mother once was. So even trivialities like the dress codes, preferences and beliefs of the adolescent social group have a huge influence on the individual and, once again, these are absorbed and the young person's mind is profoundly influenced by the common beliefs of the immediate members of his or her tribe.

Later on, as most of us develop into adults, the love bonds, the ties, with parents, adolescent groups and communities are superseded by similar bonds of love, affection and loyalty to a mate, or mates, commonly cemented by a sexual relationship and the shared responsibility of children of our own. And as adults we have our own work-, belief- and social-groups beyond mating, beyond adolescent social groups, beyond parents, mentors and even beyond communities immediate in time and place.

Every one of these attachments or bonds are influences on how we think and feel about a whole range of people, other tribes and personal experiences and, especially about ourselves. We are the sum of our relationships **plus, hopefully**, an X factor which is our own personal creativity.

So you see that love is the prime vehicle of tribal conflict. We catch the viruses of fear, suspicion and anger towards other human groups through our loving relationships. Is this kind of love the fatal flaw in

human nature? Is it the essential ingredient of the incurable tribalism **that literally threatens to destroy the human race?**

The love that is attachment and bonding that is the basis of tribalism, the love that still has a primitive, instinctual, even infantile quality to it, is about security first and altruism (agape) second. Within the tribe, once the bonds of loyalty and mutual support are assured, agape is relatively easy to practice and is well supported by shared ethics and widespread acceptance. But externally **outwith** the tribe any outreach, love, agape is often regarded by other members of the tribe from within the tribe as suspect, disloyal and even evil.

Love within the normal attachment bonds, love of family, country, religion but love without a wider scope, without a larger truth and therefor without a greater courage is worthy, common place. But that kind of love is very nearly useless **in our present global situation** in which we need to understand Russians, Chinese and many equally inscrutable tribal peoples. Is this a shocking statement? Perhaps, but it may be a realistic one.

Non-cradle Unitarians, having left their original mentors, are, in my view, more likely than most to have freed themselves from both family and friends, thought outside their inherited tribal box, and be able to operate creatively in the pursuit of peace.

The American Sociologist, Alfred Schultz, describes what he calls **'Thinking as Usual'**. I quote, 'The system of knowledge.....takes on for members of the in-group the appearance of a *sufficient* coherence, clarity and consistency to give anybody a reasonable chance of being understood. Any member born or reared within the group accepts the ready-made standardised scheme of the cultural pattern handed down to

him by ancestors, teachers and authorities and (it is used as) an unquestioned and unquestionable guide in all the situations which normally occur within his social world.' '(This knowledge) is a knowledge of trustworthy recipes for interpreting the social world and for handling things and men in order to obtain the best results in every situation with a minimum of effort.' '(It) eliminates troublesome enquiries by offering ready-made directions for use. (it) replaces truth hard to attain by comfortable truisms, and (it) substitutes the self-explanatory for the questionable.' We can call this 'thinking as usual'.

'Thinking as usual may be maintained as long as some basic assumptions hold true, namely: (1) that life and especially social life will continue to be the same as it has been so far, that is to say that the same problems requiring the same solutions will recur and that, therefore, our former experiences will suffice for mastering future situations; (2) that we may rely on the knowledge handed down to us by parents, teachers, governments, traditions, habits, etc., even if we do not understand their origin and their true meaning; (3) that in the ordinary course of affairs it is sufficient to know something about the general type or style of events we may encounter in our life-world in order to manage or control them; (4) that neither the systems of recipes as schemes of interpretation and expression nor the underlying basic assumptions just mentioned are our private affair, but that they are likewise accepted and applied by our fellow men.'

'If any one of these assumptions ceases to stand the test, thinking as usual becomes unworkable. Then a "crisis" arises which "interrupts the flow of habit and gives rise to changed conditions of consciousness and practice". It over throws precipitously the cultural pattern which no longer functions as a system of tested recipes at hand.'

The meeting and mixing of cultures and strangers in the global village taxes the person who clings to this 'thinking as usual' to breaking point and it exacerbates our natural wariness, or even fear, of strangers and of strange peoples.

But there is another cause of war. There is probably a genetic and biological advantage to any human tribe of a strategy of raiding neighbouring tribes. Recently, as a part of the examination of our beliefs about human nature, I enquired of Stephen "Did he know of any species in which the males raided another group, killed the other males and carried off the females?" Yes he did and of course they were monkeys. Of course the genes of the raiding males survived and reproduced when those of their dead rivals did not – a clear biological triumph. This question was prompted by my memories of the Roman legend of the Rape of the Sabine women in which the early Romans attacked the nearby Sabine tribe in the mountains and carried off their women. There are numerous horrific examples of this from biblical history. The massacre of the Amalekites was apparently ordered by the Jewish God. Another example is the treatment of the Midianites in which by the orders of Moses, all the males and children were massacred and only the virgin females were spared and given to the captains of the Isrealite host. It is not too far a comparison to see that this is how the Roman and the British Empires were built. Superior military tactics in the earlier case or superior military technology in the other led to a combination of trading with and plundering of the natives. It could even be argued that the Vikings did it to us earlier. Raiding is a biological winner.

Are there any biological advantages in peace? Look at the roles of Sweden and Switzerland in the last world war. Of course there were! So, does the survival and multiplication of Richard Dawkins' selfish genes lie in craftily staying out of wars while your neighbours tare each

other to pieces? Perhaps, but think of the foreign policy of England over recent centuries the aim of which was to ensure that no single tribe became too strong and took over all of Europe. It was very successful until the conditions changed with the Industrial Revolution and it became possible to move masses of men quickly from place to place and even over the water. Then, after that change, instead of intermittent small wars, we had to fight massive world wars using military technology developing at an exponential rate. Finally if a nuclear winter rolls around the northern hemisphere, staying out becomes impossible. We are all called to be global peacemakers, each in our own way.

So have I made you uncomfortable? The calling of the preacher is to comfort the comfortless and to discomfort the comfortable. Let us see if there is any comfort for the comfortless.

Conflict Resolution has become an academic discipline in its own right. Many American Universities and some British offer courses in it. I have no qualifications in it other than the same lively interest that you **should** have.

Let us make a distinction between local and international conflicts, although both are a form of tribalism. Locally, the fertile conditions for the beginning of conflict are wherever and whenever two different groups are living in proximity without mixing. There has to be potential competition for scarce resources. It might be for jobs, for water or for houses, for fertile land or for places in a privileged elite. Then there has to be poor individual communications. Most people in one group do not marry into the other. They do not spend their leisure time together or even speak to each other much except for limited purposes of survival (e.g. shopping, travelling). Educating the young of the two groups

separately promotes just these poor communications. Finally, poor political leadership, confrontational, chauvinistic, emotively rabble-rousing can tip the balance into conflict.

Even without poor political leadership, living in close proximity will produce an inevitable crop of injuries and grievances that an individual of one group has suffered at the hands of an individual of another group. So there is a mounting history of wrongs and escalating hostility between the two groups. This could, and frequently does, lead to a Sicilian morality - a morality where very high ethical standards are maintained between the individuals of the same family (even a Mafia family) but you can do anything you like to someone who is not your family and you will be supported in it. At its extreme it issues in a series of vengeance killings.

Internationally, conflict mainly arises over scarce resources (fish, oil, water, minerals) or friendly territory (Russia surrounded by USA air bases).

In all cases there is serious narrowing and impoverishment of thinking. Prejudice, bigotry, stereotyping and the growth of myths inside each group about the other. There is increased solidarity within each group with an intensification of love for your own group and an ennobling, and over valuation of its people, values and history. But fear, ignorance and suspicion of the external group lead to the devaluing, degrading and, ultimately the hatred and dehumanising **and, above all, the demonisation** of its members. Then we have fears and phantasies of genocide and annihilation. The fear rises with panic mongering rumours and this may give rise to a pre-emptive strike, “get your retaliation in first” as the saying says.

Social psychologists like Sherrif and Zimbardo have conducted famous large scale experiments in which they brought together ordinary people into a situation which divided them into groups and put these groups in competition or conflict with each other. Mustapha Sherrif put ordinary law-abiding American boys into two groups who competed with each other in a boy's camp and before long violence broke out. Philip Zimbardo divided his volunteers into prisoners and prison guards and, within weeks, the experiment had to be terminated because unacceptable levels of violence had broken out between the groups. If groups brought together randomly for experimental purposes in an artificial situation can develop savage antagonisms within weeks, so much more can pre-existing groups or tribes develop even more savage antagonisms both locally and internationally.

In real life, differences in appearances, differences in ways of working, differences in values, above all failure to interbreed (which is especially difficult for people with differences in colour and language) can all give rise to conflict and to the growth and promulgation of damaging myths about each other. Myths of group superiority, (e.g. the blonde master-race; the Jewish chosen people) and separatist ideologies, e.g. the Donbas for the Russians, Scotland for the Scots can give rise to hostile incidents, e.g. burning effigies of Alec Salmon and astonishingly these can escalate from minor conflicts even to tribal genocide.

We can all be peacemakers, whether we call ourselves pacifists or not. Even the man who talks softly but carries a big stick, as US President Theodore Roosevelt famously advised, is still a peacemaker, especially when he is talking softly, and even better when he can drop the big stick. I personally believe that peace is not really about destroying the nuclear weapons that we frighten ourselves with or about insisting on

decommissioning in Northern Ireland or about refusing to fight. It is more likely that it begins and ends in the mind or, if you prefer that language, in the spirit. Peace begins in an armchair with keeping ourselves well informed and extending a loving empathy to the culture and situation of the other tribe in so far as we know them. It continues in everyday life as we challenge members of our own tribe when they pass on scurrilous allegations and hateful untruths about another tribe. Certainly the work of peace-making is asking to be done 24/7 in many situations of everyday life. We cannot afford to be unthinking, to be carried away on a vague tide of emotion or wishful thinking or to be unreal or impractical about it.

So what can we do? We can work at the origins of the conflict. We can support diplomatic bargaining over resources. We can work to explode religious and political myths of superiority. We can encourage working together and, especially, interbreeding. If the Chinese can insist on one male child per couple, perhaps other governments can give financial privileges to mixed race, or mixed language couples. We must remain eternally vigilant in addressing and settling minor incidents between tribes. We can encourage the values of peace inside and between groups. We can support world organisations for peace. We can endow and support more academics in peace and conflict resolution studies.

So in a world of competing and interacting groups I believe that disarmament is too late. The war began long ago with thoughts and words and disarmament of ideas should have begun then. Further disarmament leaves us as exposed to the casual raider so we must be prepared for violence and must not carelessly expose our vulnerable loved ones to it – even in the name of some ideal of universal peace. I am one of those who completely agree with Theodore Roosevelt's

famous injunction “Talk softly and carry a big stick”. So if my form of pacifism involves ensuring that I have a big stick what does the ‘talking softly’ involve?

Soon after the second world war a group of world-acknowledged authorities in social sciences was brought together by the United Nations and they published a report in which they unanimously stated that it was not inevitable that human kind should so continually go to war. I absolutely agree that war is not inevitable but the way to avoid it involves such fantastic foresight and effort that I seriously doubt that human kind is often capable of avoiding it.

I believe absolutely in what we might conveniently call ‘working upriver’. This means I believe in working to increase understanding and respect between groups or tribes as I refer to them. Hopefully, by various means such as increased contact, education and efforts to interpret, we can reduce or even dissipate the causes of conflict long before they generate such anger and fear and reach such a strength that war and violence becomes unavoidable. That is a major reason why I am committed to activity in the arena of interfaith understanding.

Finally I must return to my question: Is universal and permanent peace even **desirable**? War, as has been pointed out earlier today, is one of the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse, an important mechanism of human population control. So I would claim that even if universal and permanent peace were attainable, it would only be desirable if there was population control and IF the rampant environmental ravages of uncontrolled capitalism were checked. Perhaps, if GLOBAL inter-tribal suspicions prevent co-operation on coping with climate change, someone will think that the only way to stop the consequences of the

way we live just now is to go to war to establish a world government and save the planet? AND for the survival of the species THEY MIGHT BE RIGHT

Contemplation (Iain)

Let us be thankful that many great minds and human skills are being exercised to prevent war – in the United Nations in the diplomatic services of many countries in the full time study of those in many universities in Departments of Conflict Resolution.

Let us resolve to play our own little parts in the avoidance of war, whether we prefer to qork down river at the point of disarmament or up river at the point of the origins of conflict between groups, knowing that we shall not always succeed yet continuing in the face of that knowledge to do our best.

Stand for Third Hymn (Green) Song of Peace (Margaret)

Hymn 226 - Song of Peace

**This is my song, O God of all the nations,
A song of peace for lands afar and mine;
This is my home, the country where my heart is,
Here are my hopes, my dreams, my holy shrine;
But other hearts in other lands are beating
With hopes and dreams as true and high as mine.**

**My countries sky's are bluer than the ocean,
And sunlight beams on clover leaf and pine;
But other lands have sunlight, too, and clover,
And skies are everywhere as blue as mine.**

**O hear my song, thou God of all the nations,
A song of peace for their land and for mine.**

Remain standing for the Final Words

(From **Where we stand** on the Unitarian UK central web site)

lain Unitarians affirm the values of peace, justice, forgiveness and reconciliation. Some call these divine values. They are held to be necessary for the wholeness and happiness of any human community, from the family to the nation and the world.

Margaret On pacifism, as on all issues of personal conscience, each Unitarian is free to come to his or her own conclusions without fear of judgement or censure. So although there are many Unitarian pacifists, there is no explicit requirement or implicit expectation on the matter.

lain Unitarians do agree that war is wrong, but a wide range of opinions as to its necessity exist. Some rule out the use of force entirely, believing that it can never be justified in any situation. For others there are sadly, tragically, situations in which the use of proportionate force is necessary in order to prevent or defeat a greater evil, particularly to defend the innocent and the weak in immediate peril. A unanimous position is that humanity must find better ways than war and violence to resolve conflicts and disputes.

Congregation remains standing for closing verse announced by
Margaret

Green 308 Let people living in all lands

Let people living in all lands

Declare that fear and war are done

Joined by the labours of their hands

In love and understanding one

Postlude (Stephen)