

“Show by your good life that your works are done with gentleness born of wisdom.” (James 3:13) Read to us on Sunday evening as we commemorated the 100th anniversary of the end of the “war to end all wars”, by Barnabas, a boy not much younger than some who signed up. Four years, three months and two weeks of a bloody, horrific and tragic event in world history that cost men, boys - whole families and communities - their lives.

To say that that war was wrong, would take away the value of the millions of individual lives that were lost and the millions of lives affected by loved ones killed, gassed or injured. On the eve of the Armistice, 10 November 1918, a sermon was preached by Revd T.A. Lacey, Canon of Worcester; in it he said that war, “is the fruit of the folly and the sin of men.” But sometimes it is right to stand up and maintain important principles. It is right to stand up against dictators or terrorism or extremism, even though there might be a huge cost. But ‘principles’ can be very costly, and lead us to make decisions which, if we were to look back on them and analyse them, we can often think, “How did we get here?” Sound familiar?

So how do we see the folly of doing something, ‘whatever the cost’, before it’s too late? That is wisdom. Wisdom is knowing when to make a stand, when it is right to fight; and when it is right to, ‘let it go’. Wisdom comes from looking back and learning from the past and applying it.

If we believe that God is the God of creation, he is the God of all creation. That means he is the God of those whom we might find ourselves fighting against or disputing with as we stand up for a principle. Both sides in the Great War were, predominantly, Christian societies. Both sides would have been praying to God for victory - to the same God! Both sides had much in common.

If wisdom is about applying to life what we learn in life, when are we going to grow in wisdom and learn from Jesus when he was asked, “Which commandment is the most important?” He replied, “Love the Lord your God. And love your neighbour as yourself.” However, loving your neighbour as yourself is not an easy thing to learn; and certainly is not an easy thing to put into practice! That, though, is what God hopes we will all eventually learn.

Whilst there are times when we have to stand by a principle, perhaps the world would be better if all humanity could stand by a higher principle: with all learning to live together loving our neighbour as ourselves. Until that day, God still cries at what His creation does to one another, as both sides in a conflict suffer. As we celebrate again the birth of Jesus this Christmas time, let us remember the wisdom that baby brought to us.

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