

“A Time for Peace”  
Stouffville United Church  
Sunday, November 8, 2020

Micah 4:1-5

On Remembrance Day we remember our war dead. We remember our war heroes. Those men and women who answered the call to service, a call which led them to inhospitable lands and deadly enemies. Canada has entered into a number of war conflicts that have taken our troops overseas, in the 1914 First World War, and the 1939 Second World War. And most recently the Afghanistan War. But there are two other wars that I knew little about – the Boer War in South Africa from 1899 to 1902, and the Korean War, sometimes referred to as the Forgotten War, from 1950 to 1953. To help me learn more, I’ve been reading Pierre Berton’s “Marching as to War – Canada’s Turbulent Years 1899-1953.”<sup>1</sup>

The Boer War was a rally to answer an ‘imperial call’ to Arms to regain British territory in South Africa that had been taken over by other white settlers of Dutch origin. During the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Canada was in love with Queen Victoria and she had just celebrated her 60<sup>th</sup> year of reign, her Diamond Jubilee in 1897. As Berton writes, “The Empire! The sacred Empire! Empire worship amounted to a religion.”<sup>2</sup> Canada responded to the call to arms with a ‘scant sixteen days to recruit, organize, clothe, arm, and equip a thousand young infantry soldiers and dispatch them on a 7,000 mile ocean voyage to the war zone.’<sup>3</sup> The terrain was like nothing these young men had experienced, desert and terrible dust storms, scorching heat, no water, little food, and terrible diseases. And yet, in the moment of war, the Canadians distinguished themselves with a spirit that was truly unique and brave. Lord Roberts, the commander-in-chief, said of the Canadians troops, “*Canadian* now stands for bravery, dash and courage.”<sup>4</sup> Of the 7,368 Canadians who went off to war in South Africa, a mere 224 were killed, and half of these succumbed to disease, not bullets. The Boers were beaten in the end, the Empire prevailed.”<sup>5</sup>

The Korean War was declared after “North Korean troops unexpectedly invaded South Korea on June 25, 1950.”<sup>6</sup> The Canadian Legion magazine from this month reported that, “the United Nations called on its members for help to stop the attack and restore peace. Canada’s first military response was to send in the navy. On July 5, HMC ships *Cayuga*, *Athabaskan*, and *Sioux* set sail, the first of eight Canadian destroyers.”<sup>7</sup> “Of the 30,000 Canadians who served in ground, naval and air forces during the Korean War, there were 516 deaths.”<sup>8</sup> And like the Boer war in South Africa, Canadian troops met a terrain for which they were unprepared. Rather than landing in what they thought would be a tropical climate, they found a geography filled with canonical hills, with weather that was cold and inhospitable.

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<sup>1</sup> Pierre Berton, *Marching as to War: Canada’s Turbulent Years 1899-1953* (Canada: Anchor Canada, 2002).

<sup>2</sup> Berton, *Marching as to War*, 24.

<sup>3</sup> Berton, *Marching as to War*, 34.

<sup>4</sup> Berton, *Marching as to War*, 54.

<sup>5</sup> Berton, *Marching as to War*, 80.

<sup>6</sup> Legion Magazine, November/December 2020, 39.

<sup>7</sup> Legion Magazine, November/December 2020, 39.

<sup>8</sup> Legion Magazine, November/December 2020, 45.

As Berton writes, “There was little to differentiate one Korean hill from another and no way in that sea of craggy ridges to give it any personality. Every hill on the map had a number as an indication of its height in meters – but with certain exceptions – Pork Chop Hill or Little Gibraltar ... who, today, save for a few veterans, a gaggle of military historians, remembers 355? The troops knew it well, for it was the scene of some of the heaviest fighting in the static war. Eleven months after the [Canadian] Van Doos clung to it ... it was the turn of their sister unit, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion of the Royal Canadian Regiment, on October 23, 1952. Again they held Hill 355 against some fifteen hundred Chinese at a cost of sixty-seven casualties.”<sup>9</sup>

The Korean War gave Lester B. Pearson “the opportunity to advance his personal dream: the establishment by the United Nations of a military force to resist aggression.”<sup>10</sup> It would be later during the Suez Crisis that Pearson was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for his efforts and success in the creation of the United Nations Emergency Force in 1956. Berton commented on this landmark moment in our history, “We are not a belligerent people, nor is Canada a warlike nation. We save our aggressive emotions for ice hockey ... and rejoice in the new title of peacekeepers.”<sup>11</sup> Peacekeeping continues to be part of our international identity and reputation.

The prophet Micah prophesied during the reigns of the three 8<sup>th</sup> Century BCE Judean kings Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah. As a commentary writes, “During this time the Near East was dominated by the Neo-Assyrian Empire, which conquered and deported much of the northern kingdom of Israel ... Micah also witnessed the utter devastation of the southern kingdom of Judah in 701 by the Assyrian king Sennacherib, who claims to have taken “forty-six strong cities” and countless smaller towns from Hezekiah’s embattled nation and to have besieged Jerusalem.”<sup>12</sup>

Clearly, Micah knew a thing or two about war. He had watched as the Assyrian empire invaded, conquered and destroyed whole cities and countryside. In the first three chapters of the Book of Micah, God speaks through Micah in a series of oracles about destruction and chaos. But in Chapter 4, Micah offers a promise of restoration, where the teaching of God’s word will instruct the people on the ways of the Lord. And as different translations read, the people will never again make war or attack one another; they will quit learning how to kill one another; neither shall they learn war any more.

Last Wednesday, Steve Paikin, on the TVO show, the Agenda, was hosting a panel discussion on the aftermath of the American election. One of his guests, Timothy Garton Ash, from Oxford University in the UK said that there were ‘less democratic governments than non-democratic governments in this world.’<sup>13</sup> Having always lived in a democratic country, I had assumed that democracy was more prevalent in the world and was actually shocked by Mr. Garton Ash’s comment. Democracy is, as a societal value, perhaps a little more fragile, and more precious, than I had thought.

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<sup>9</sup> Berton, *Marching as to War*, 564-565.

<sup>10</sup> Berton, *Marching as to War*, 579.

<sup>11</sup> Berton, *Marching as to War*, 585.

<sup>12</sup> Feasting on the Word, Year C, Vol 1, Exegetical Perspective, 75.

<sup>13</sup> Timothy Garton Ash, November 4<sup>th</sup>, 2020 TVO The Agenda, hosted by Steve Paikin.

Which makes these past few days of the toxic spillage from the American election even more damaging to the presence of worldwide democratic principles. If our American neighbours were somehow seen as the ‘city on a hill’, as the ‘gold standard’ of democracy, as a leading example of values that enshrine the freedom to elect a government of the people’s choice, then significant damage to the global name of democracy has been done by the words and actions of President Donald Trump.

Democracy is about seeing your neighbour as yourself. Democracy is ‘the belief in freedom and equality between all people.’<sup>14</sup> The lack of democracy in this world fuels the fire of oppression, of conflict and the outbreak of war, and with it, civilian casualties and the death of soldiers.

The prophet Micah opens his prophecy talking about the ‘last hopeful days that are coming’ where ‘the nations of the world will say, “Come, let’s go up, everyone.” A time where everyone ‘will find rest beneath their own fig trees or grape vines; they will live in peace; and no one shall make them afraid.’ The last hopeful days that are coming, says the prophet. A day when I will have a tree to rest under its shade, and you will have a tree to sit beneath, and our children’s children will inherit a world where peace is far more prevalent than war.

The last hopeful days *are* coming says the Lord.

Then shall all shackles fall;  
the stormy clangour  
of wild war music  
o’er the earth shall cease;

*Love* shall tread out  
the baleful fire of anger,  
and in its ashes  
plant the tree of peace.<sup>15</sup>

Thanks be to God. Amen.

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<sup>14</sup> <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/democracy>

<sup>15</sup> United Church of Canada Voices United Hymnal, VU 594.