ANZAC Day… A Time to Imagine Peace

This coming Tuesday New Zealand "celebrates" ANZAC Day for the 101st time since the battle of Gallipoli where 7447 young Kiwis died or were wounded for "King and Country". Forty young men from our congregation were in their number. Six, or 15%, did not return.

ANZAC Day has grown in popularity in my time in New Zealand. Dawn parades will be well attended around the country. Tears will be shed at the reading of *In Flanders Field* and as "The Last Post" is sounded. But I will not be there. I am put off by the militaristic pomp and circumstance. I chafe when Jesus' words in John's Gospel (15:13), "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends" are misused to glorify dying in a war. They did not make the supreme sacrifice; those in power callously and carelessly sacrificed them.

There are banners around town proclaiming, "We will remember them". I will, but not for what they did, but for what was done to them, their families and to our country. In World War I nearly 10% of New Zealand's population served and nearly 20% of those died. Many, if not most, of those who returned home bore life-long physical and emotional scars. Yes, I will remember them but I will also remember those 286 men who were imprisoned for refusing to serve and for speaking out against the war. One of them was Unitarian minister James Chapple, who at one time served this congregation. To me, they were the true heroes of *the war to end all wars*. They sacrificed their freedom and endured taunts of cowardice from family, friend and neighbour for the sake of peace. I hope I could show such courage if ever I were in their shoes.

Of course, WWI did not live up to the billing that it would end all wars. According to Wikipedia a war is defined as when 1000 or more have died in a calendar year. Right now—at this very moment--there are four wars being fought where over 10,000 have died in the last year and 10 more where 1000 to 9,999 have died. Then there are the 43 armed-conflicts that have not YET quite achieved that inglorious arbitrary number.

While I choose not to be at a Dawn Parade, I will certainly not be ignoring ANZAC Day. It will be a time for me to "imagine" peace à la John Lennon. Sometimes it seems the only option left to us. Being at war appears to be ingrained in the human condition. So, am I wasting my time? Is peace only a pipe dream?

Respected mediator and negotiation scholar William Ury says in his book *Transforming Conflict at Home, at Work, and in the World,* that it is a common misconception that humans are naturally violent and warlike. Archaeologists have found no evidence of war or organised violence during the vastly greater part of human and pre-human history. Evidence of war only occurs in the past 10,000 years. Prior to that, organised violence would not have been adaptive in the prehistoric

environment. Humans existed for hundreds of thousands of years in gatherer-hunter societies. Groups were small and mobile, population density was low, and resources were relatively plentiful. Survival depended on the ability to cooperate, and share labour, food and resources.

Under such conditions, war made very little sense. There would be little to gain. Loss of even a few members could devastate a group. Other groups could retaliate, or at least stop sharing and cooperating with the aggressive group. Moving away was always a feasible, and a much lower cost option. Faced with the challenge of survival, everyone could benefit from cooperation, while everyone would usually lose from fighting. Anthropological studies suggest that early humans would have had as many conflicts as modern ones, but that they would have contained those conflicts and averted violence by using a combination of the "third side", which I will explain further in a moment, and exit options. In strongly interdependent societies, social discipline is strong, and people rarely disregard the communal will. Ury concludes, "humanity evolved in what might be called a 'co-culture,' where conflict was handled most constructively—through coexistence and cooperation."

To say that humans are naturally aggressive is misleading. Humans (and other primates) certainly have the capacity for violent aggression. Yet humans also show a capacity to control aggression. Modern human societies show extreme variations in their rates of violence – as great as a thousand-fold from the most peaceful to the most violent. Ury notes, "the level of variation alone suggests that far more than human nature is at play." Violence is simply one tactic among many that people may use to handle disputes. Violence is a capacity that humans exercise by choice, rather than an instinct that manifests itself uncontrollably.

Why then did warfare arise in the last 10,000 years? Ury argues that war arose with an increase in population, the relative scarcity of resources, and a shift to sedentary, agriculture-based societies. Ury notes, "the form of social organisation changed from an open network to a relatively closed village." The agricultural revolution created the first human cities, and a population explosion. Under these new conditions, war begins to make sense. The aggressor stood to gain possession of fixed resources, the value of which outweighed cooperation. Slavery became feasible. With the population boom, people were increasingly expendable. Moving away from the conflict was no longer an option. At the same time, traditional structures for managing conflict were weakened.

This era also saw the invention of human organisations based on coercion and hierarchical power. Power over others becomes a vicious goal; pursued from greed and from the fear that if one does not dominate then they will be oppressed. As Ury describes it, "networks of negotiation turned into pyramids of power." Rulers are even more compelled by the logic of war, since their personal costs are low (soldiers do the dying) and the potential gains are high.

Ury argues that the conditions of human life are again changing, and changing in ways that make creating peace and ending war more possible. The basic resource of human society is shifting from land to knowledge. Land is a fixed resource, and so invites fixed-pie thinking, emphasis on boundaries and competition. Knowledge is an expandable resource. It increases through being shared, and so invites cooperation and

erodes boundaries. Because modern weapons are relatively cheap and massively destructive, violent conflict is changing from a win-lose proposition, to an all-lose situation. In a nuclear exchange, no one would win; conventional bombs and landmines are little better. Knowledge also offers an alternative to coercion as a source of power. Correspondingly, hierarchical power structures are increasingly being levelled, and replaced with decentralised networks.

People are also increasingly globally interdependent. Increased interdependence leads to more conflicts, with potentially widespread impacts, and to greater vulnerability. However, "growing vulnerability means greater motivation for the community to take action to prevent harmful conflict." The knowledge revolution creates both the motivation and the tools to resurrect the third side. Ury sees an increase in the amount and quality of negotiation happening in all areas of human life: negotiations between citizens in democracies, between managers in decentralized business corporations, between spouses in egalitarian marriages. He predicts, "The pyramids of power are collapsing into the time-honoured networks of negotiation."

Those who attended our first Creative Conflict workshop last Wednesday know that peace is not the absence of conflict. Conflict cannot and should not be eliminated, since it is necessary for creating change. Peace requires conflicts be channeled into constructive, cooperative processes.

In western or modern societies, conflicts are typically thought of as having two sides: the opponents. As an anthropologist, Ury has studied two simple societies, the Semai and the Bushmen, which are well known for their peacefulness. He argues that those societies recognize what moderns have largely forgotten. "Every conflict occurs within a community that constitutes the 'third side' of any dispute." The Semai and the Bushmen both employ this third side purposefully and vigorously, to contain and resolve conflicts before they escalate. Ury sees traces of the third side in action in modern societies, in situations ranging from family conflicts to international disputes.

Ury describes the third side as "*people*--from the community—using a certain kind of *power*--the power of peers--from a certain *perspective*—of common ground--supporting a certain *process*--of dialogue and nonviolence—and aiming for a certain *product*--a 'triple win'." The presence of third parties usually has a moderating effect on conflicts. The third side perspective, the view from the broader community, can remind disputants of their shared interests. The third side strives for a solution that satisfies both the disputants and the wider community.

The third side is made up of both insiders and outsiders. In the case of South Africa's conflict over apartheid, the governments, institutions and peoples of the other nations such as New Zealand's protest of the Springbok Tour were the outsiders. Insiders included church and business groups, most notably Nelson Mandela and F.W. de Klerk, who together made a powerfully effective voice for the third side. Ury also suggests that there is an inner third side in most people; an innate resistance to violence which, although it can obviously be weakened, can also be cultivated and strengthened. In short, the third side is all of us. By ignoring a conflict or taking sides we all contribute to escalating it. And so, preventing violent conflict is everyone's responsibility. Even when we are ourselves directly involved in a conflict, we have the option of adopting the third side perspective.

If we are going to imagine peace we have to imagine ourselves as peacemakers. That requires first, rejecting pessimistic beliefs about the inevitability of war or destructive conflicts. Second, we can each learn some problem-solving and conflict-resolution skills. Then we need to claim our niche in the "third side". That requires discovering which peace-building role best suits us, and incorporating it into our existing activities. The roles are grouped around three tasks. A teacher or bridge-builder will seek to prevent destructive conflict. A mediator or healer will seek to resolve conflicts. A peace-keeper or witness seeks to contain escalating conflict. There is role for everyone.

As Unitarians committed to peace-making, let's look to form alliances and work with other third-siders such as the Quakers to support third side activities in the broader community and the world. Let's commit to developing, building and supporting new third side initiatives and institutions as part of our peace and social justice mission. Finally, let's recognise that we are creating a profound social movement toward peaceful human coexistence. Ever the optimist, Ury ends by saying, "because the task of creating a genuine co-culture may take a generation or more, there is no better time for us to begin than now."

To imagine it is only the beginning.