ANZAC Day 2016. A time to remember the landing at Gallipoli by Australians and New Zealanders and servicemen from other countries who went ashore at the Gallipoli Peninsula. A time to remember defence forces who have been involved in many other military engagements, and to remember those who have served as peacemakers in many regions of the world. A time to remember the ANZACs who were described as standing for ‘reckless valour in a good cause, for enterprise, resourcefulness, fidelity, comradeship and endurance’ *(C.Bean)*. It is a time to offer a tribute to all those who have given their lives to love of country and love of liberty, those who have served, and those that still today step bravely into the unknown to serve our country. It’s time to acknowledge the service of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians, who have served in Australia’s armed forces in every military conflict since the Boer War. And to the Sikhs who fought alongside the ANZACS at Gallipoli with the 14th Sikh Regiment suffering possibly the highest casualty rate of any force during the Gallipoli campaign, with only 4 survivors. And there are more examples of the cultural diversity in the ANZACs that would become a defining characteristic of Australia. This is a time to acknowledge the way those who have served in war are inextricably woven into the soul and identity of our nation.

It’s a time to talk about war and dying, as well as peace and living. It’s a time for gratitude, for remembrance. It’s a time for lament. It’s a time to remember those who are caught between life and death in war zones, and - for some defence force personnel - caught between life and death when they return home, when they find life has lost its loveliness. It’s also time to remember those who seek places of safety, to escape from those same war zones. It’s a time to gather all the stories. So many stories will have been told today all around this great country. So many stories will have remained untold, set aside because they belong to the arena of war and are too hard to tell.

The last of the ANZACs died 14 years ago. All the stories have been told that will ever be told by those who were there. What happens to history when there are no more first hand witnesses, when the last story and memory has been told? When that history is passed over to the succeeding generations? How is the history cradled and valued? How is it possible to allow the story to simply be the story without embellishment? How might we learn the lessons from the arena of war? And in what ways might we recognise when that history has been appropriated for other purposes? One contemporary historian suggests, ‘history can be used to define and even distort our national heritage and national values’. *(Henry Reynolds, <http://www.theage.com.au/it-pro/letting-go-of-anzac-20100401-rif5.html>, from the epilogue written by Henry Reynolds and Marilyn Lake for What's Wrong with Anzac? edited by Henry Reynolds and Marilyn Lake)*

Certainly, the ANZAC legend has taken on a special significance at the heart of the Australian story. The legend is enhanced by privileging some stories over other stories - stories that give primacy to strength and resilience despite adversity, stories that embed courage, endurance and tenacity, mateship, courage, and loyalty as part of our national character. All very worthy. Stories of the ‘underside’ of war take a back seat in the process.

As the legend grows, it may actually fail to honour those who served, whose real stories need to be told. People like the men and women on the WW1 Honour Rolls here at Pilgrim Church, whose stories have been researched and now are no longer simply names on a board. These are stories of courage and victory and camaraderie, as well as defeat and loss and grief. All the stories need to be told, not only those that serve the greater narrative that has become the ANZAC legend. What stories are missing? Whose stories are missing? How do we honour all these stories?

How do we listen well to the wisdom of those whose stories need to be told? How do we listen to and learn from the experience of defence force personnel serving now?

The wisdom of the ANZACs themselves was that ‘most battlefields are unsatisfactory places to resolve arguments and conflict’. One of the last ANZACs, Ted Matthews who died in 1997, reflected, "The whole point of ANZAC day has been lost. It's not for old diggers to remember, it's for survivors to warn young people against romanticising war.”

A preparedness to recognise failure alongside victory surely serves as a caution against romanticising war. Not to focus on failure in a way that dishonours those who have offered their service and their lives in any war efforts, but that cautions us that the arena of war holds death and destruction and grief and weeping - even as it strives to achieve an outcome of peace. And the casualties of war may continue on long after the battles are concluded, with the experience of returned soldiers and their families and communities. Which narrative do we tell that reflects the truth about those who serve in military engagements, and when does the ANZAC legend actually serve to discount the lived experience of so many defence force personnel, where stories are left unspoken?

ANZAC Day services are solemn occasions, with remembrance of those who have served in war and those who have died. These times are also times of lament - lament for each time that the possibility of peace is fractured, or discarded. Lament for each time small and large hostilities are allowed to be fanned into flame. Lament for those whose lives have been diminished. “Lament is a cry to God. Lament is the cry of those who see the truth of the world’s deep wounds and the cost of seeking peace. It is the prayer of those who are deeply disturbed by the way things are.”
(Emmanuel Katangole & Chris Rice, Reconciling All Things: A Christian Vision for Justice, Peace and Healing (Resources for Reconcilation, p. 78)

To lament, we must stop, and notice the way things are: the conflict and the chaos in the world; the political rhetoric of demonizing others; and those in the community who denigrate others - for their religion, ethnicity, their social and economic circumstances; and those whose privilege keeps them at a safe distance to the despair of so many. We need to allow these things to sit heavy in our spirits, these things that are the seeds of dis-ease, conflict and violence. And then we need to allow a rooted hopefulness to grow - the confidence that there is another way, a better way, that can be found for the common welfare and good of all. And we are all part of that process.

Let us sit in that place. And then let us give honour to the sacrificial service of defence force personnel in military engagements in this last 100 years. We cradle their stories, each one. We honour each one.

Let me conclude with this text from Lamentations, and may hope in God’s faithfulness and mercy and love orient our own lives towards those things to which the ANZACs committed their lives - to peace, justice, freedom and reconciliation.

Lamentations 3:22-23 (ESV)

**22**The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases; God’s mercies never come to an end;

**23**they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.