

The Rev. Wayne Nicholson  
St. John's Episcopal Church, Mount  
Pleasant  
11<sup>th</sup> November 2007  
Veterans Day

On the eleventh hour of the eleventh day  
of the eleventh month of 1918, an  
armistice between Germany and the Allies  
took effect on the Western Front of the first  
World War. Since 1954, this day  
(previously observed as Armistice Day)  
has been marked as Veteran's Day—a  
time for remembering all who have served  
in our armed forces. And as we remember  
today all who have served our country in  
uniform throughout our nation's history, we

especially recall those who are serving  
today – those who are abroad in lands of  
turmoil and terror, those who are here,  
supporting them, and all of them, men and  
women, enlisted and career, who hold in  
their hearts and minds the great desire for  
peace.

For that is the desire of all soldiers, and  
that is – or should be – the desire of all  
nations. Peace.

Veterans Day is largely intended to thank  
veterans for their service, to acknowledge  
that their contributions to United States

national security are appreciated, and to underscore the fact that those who served - not only those who died - have sacrificed.

As someone who has never served in the military, I've struggled with how to speak of war and of peace. I've struggled because although I believe our Lord calls us to peace and to personal sacrifice, "turning the other cheek," I also have studied enough world history and the Church fathers – Aquinas and Augustine, particularly -- to have some knowledge of the theory and theology of just war.

And so ultimately, I believe in a moral ethic that – at least for me -- allows for war – national violence – in limited cases. But I also believe that the ultimate goal of such war is a return to peace. A return to mutuality in relationship. Nation speaking with nation, countries united in their search for justice and freedom, for the elevation of all humankind to our highest level of dignity.

Wrote the prophet Isaiah, "*In days to come the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established as the highest of the mountains, and shall be raised above the*

*hills; all the nations shall stream to it. And God shall judge between the nations, and shall arbitrate for many peoples; they shall beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore.” (Isaiah 2:4)*

When President Woodrow Wilson proclaimed the first Armistice Day holiday in 1919, he said, “To us in America, the reflections of Armistice Day will be filled with solemn pride in the heroism of those who died in the country’s service and with gratitude for the victory, both because of

the thing from which it has freed us and because of the opportunity it has given America to show her sympathy with peace and justice in the councils of the nations...” – they shall beat their swords into plowshares.

Blessed are the peacemakers.

The late Rev. Louis A. Dole wrote this: “War has been a conspicuous part of human history, particularly in the history of so-called Christian nations. The wars mentioned in the Bible describe the battles of right against wrong, of good against evil,

which have to be fought in the human heart and mind. Men have always easily been led to fight against other men, but we should recognize that it is the unwillingness to fight against evils in our own hearts which is the real cause of these wars in the outward world. Wars must take place within or without, and if men refuse to fight against and overcome pride, ambition, the love of power, the love of conquest, and the desire to rule over rather than to serve the neighbor, these loves will continue to break out in open hostilities and wars.”

War, it must be said, can be a requirement of peace.

But blessed are the peacemakers. For they shall beat their swords into plowshares.

It is our humanity that causes war. I believe in a God who has given humankind free will – to act for good or to act for evil. It is the desire for *goodness* that can drive even the best of us away from the pacific nature of our Lord, for it is the desire for goodness that can lead us toward war against true evil. That desire for goodness, however, is always a desire for peace.

Blessedness. Tranquility. Harmony. The peace that allows goodness to grow and flourish – the peace which, in the words of a familiar blessing, passes all understanding.

It is the peace of God, the ultimate peace, that we strive for. It is the peace of God that all soldiers must seek. For it is in that peace that humankind will prosper, so that each of us will find justice and wisdom and love.

Blessed are the peacemakers.

Today we recall those men and women who have served in the interest of peace. We honor them for their sacrifice and we pray for the safety of those who serve us today. On this day let us each take a moment to be silent, recalling the goodness we seek. Let us be silent and remember the fallen. And let us be silent in a prayer that we all become peacemakers.

Amen.