

09 NOVEMBER 2025

A Reflection

Rev Wayne Toleafoa

THE BLESSED PEACE MAKERS

Isaiah 2: 2 – 4; Romans 12: 9 – 21; Matthew 5: 1-12

Today, I'd like to reflect on Jesus' saying from Mathew 5: 9

“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the children of God.”

I'd like to begin with the story of Parihaka and then focus on Armistice Day which is normally commemorated on 11 November. Both stories are important to us as New Zealanders and continue to shape our identity.

On 5th November 1881 about 1500 of the NZ Armed Constabulary invaded the peaceful Māori settlement of Parihaka. A Māori farming community in Taranaki, which was built on confiscated Māori land. Land which belonged to the people who were then occupying it. It was their land.

Children singing and carrying baskets of bread came out to meet the armed force and were brushed aside. About 400 men and boys including the leaders Te Whiti o Rongomai and Tahu Takahi were arrested and held without trial. They were later released, after their settlement was destroyed.

By showing peaceful resistance, the people of Parihaka believed that they were following the way of Jesus. Their peaceful resistance stands out in NZ history as an example of non-violence against a large armed military force - who had spurious claims to their land.

In 2011 the National Government represented by Minister of Justice and Treaty Negotiations, the Hon Chris Findlayson reached out to the descendants of the Parihaka community in a first attempt towards apology and reconciliation. Other notable leaders were there, including former PM Jim Bolger, and several Labour and Maori Party leaders.

It was a step forward to heal old wounds and recognize where an injustice had taken place.

My interest this morning is not in blaming and shaming, but looking square on at our history, accepting responsibility for an injustice and looking for ways of reconciliation between Māori and the rest of us. I want to be among the blessed group whom Jesus called, 'the Peace makers'.

Next Tuesday 11th November will be Armistice Day /Remembrance Day, which marks the signing of the Armistice between Germany and the Allied Forces. From the 11th hour of the 11th month (November) 1918, the guns were officially supposed to be silenced (a ceasefire).

The German surrender did not take effect until 28 June 1919 under the Treaty of Versailles.

Some historical commentators think that the conditions of the German surrender were too severe – fueling resentment which led to the Second WW. Germany was forced to accept blame for the war; make huge reparations. About 13 % of her territory was lost - including the most prosperous regions and about 10% of the populations was displaced. Some of her former colonies including Samoa were lost to the Allies.

When we consider what is happening in Israel and Gaza and the ‘peace’ being brokered by some of the major powers - one wonders whether the final conditions for Gaza will simply fuel future conflicts.

Today, on Remembrance Sunday, we will remember all people, military and civilian who have died in all wars ever since the first Armistice Day.

You may be surprised to hear that since the end of World War I in 1918, New Zealand has been involved in at least 20 military conflicts and peacekeeping operations around the world.

Some of those Major Wars and Conflicts include:

World War II (1939–1945) ; the Korean War (1950–1957) ; The Malayan Emergency (1949–1960); The Indonesia–Malaysia Confrontation (1963–1966); the Vietnam War (1964–1972); The Gulf War (1990–1991); Afghanistan (2001–2021); Iraq (2003–2020); Peacekeeping and Humanitarian Missions in East Timor (1999–2002, 2006–2012); Solomon Islands (2003–2013); Bosnia, Kosovo, and the Balkans (1990s–2000s); The Sinai Peninsula (1982–present) – Multinational Force and Observers (MFO) monitoring Egypt-Israel peace treaty; South Sudan, Sudan, and other UN missions – Ongoing contributions to UN peacekeeping.

Other Deployments include Pakistan–India (1950s–present) – Military observers in Kashmir. Bougainville (1990s) – Peace monitoring during the civil conflict in Papua New Guinea. Antarctica – Ongoing logistical and support roles under Operation Antarctica; And training Ukrainian Troops from within the NATO countries.

New Zealand's military role has evolved from large-scale combat in world wars to a strong focus on *peacekeeping, humanitarian aid, and regional stability*, especially in the South Pacific and Asia.

For a small nation like ours, with approximately the population of Sydney, we have a very busy Defence Force, which has always 'boxed above its weight'.

I was privileged to be a Military Chaplain for 17 years: 4 years in the NZ Army and 13 years in the Royal NZ Navy. I very proudly and very humbly wear my service medals - for my military service in several places of conflict.

At one Anzac service a woman in the crowd asked me if the medals I was wearing were mine? I was a bit taken aback by her question and I told her I got them by eating the Weet Bix in East Timor, the Solomon Islands (3 times) and for my spending 17 years of my life in the NZDF.

In an earlier 'life' I served in the NZ Police where I knew what it was like to be involved in situations where I might find myself on the wrong side of history.

For example, I was a Policeman during the Springbok Tour of 1981. I disagreed with the tour going ahead, but that decision was way above my pay grade. The Prime Minister at the time, Rob Muldoon, made the decision that the tour should go ahead. He could not foresee the tremendous scale of the civic protest that would follow. Despite my own personal views, I did my job to keep law and order, and I was castigated by friends on both sides of the political and sporting divide. All Policemen and women were.

I don't think I was on the wrong side of history – I was among the peacemakers between two opposing parties – as Policemen and women often are. Making peace in other people's conflicts.

When I look at scenes of Parihaka and the Armed Constabulary members, I wonder how many of them felt they might be on the wrong side of history. I believe there were some who disapproved of the police action at Parihaka and disagreed with the process that denied justice to the arrestees.

Parihaka is over. The First World War is over. The Springbok Tour is over, but the struggle for justice and peace is never over.

Every day and every year we must make decisions about Love and Justice which are the main platforms of Jesus' teaching. Although he was a Jew - among God's Chosen people – as the Jews have considered themselves to be – Jesus transcended his own racial and religious origins. He became a universal Saviour.

He praised a Samaritan who showed mercy. Many of the heroes of his parables were outcasts in his own religious culture (as I have said before) Gentiles, women, tax collectors, women of ill-repute, people known as sinners and those who were ostracised because of illness or poverty.

Jesus became a universal Saviour. In our Christian tradition we have identified him as the Prince of Peace spoken of in the beautiful passage from Isaiah chapter 6.

“For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.”

As we head into the season of Advent and Christmas, we will again celebrate the birth of the Prince of Peace and pray that we and our loved ones may again experience his peace.

As we head into summer and wind up another year, I want to say ‘Thank you’ to all of you for being such a lovely congregation. Thank you for your support of my ministry and our parish. May the peace of Christ be with us in what is left of 2025.

PRAYER

God of justice and compassion,
who weeps with the wounded and walks with the brave,
we remember today the prophets of peace—
Te Whiti o Rongomai and Tohu Kākahi of Parihaka,
who stood unarmed before violence,
and all who have resisted war with courage and grace.

On this Remembrance Sunday,
we honour those who served and suffered,
those who mourn, and those who still seek healing.
May their memory call us to be merciful,
and their sacrifice stir us to pursue peace.

Bless all peacemakers—past, present, and yet to come—
those who speak truth, sow hope, and build bridges.
By your Spirit, make us instruments of your peace,
that we may honour the legacy of Parihaka
and live as children of the resurrection,
in the name of Christ, the Prince of Peace.

Amen.