

Eastwood Baptist (AM, 22/4/'18) **A CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVE ON ANZAC DAY**

(Reading: 1 Corinthians 1:18-25)

Introduction Next Wednesday is an important day for many Australians, a day which some people have suggested is more truly our national day than Australia Day. The playwright Alan Seymour called Anzac Day “the one day of the year”. Anzac Day is a day of remembrance for Australians who have given their lives in all military conflicts, but the date of 25th April specifically commemorates the landing at Gallipoli 103 years ago. Remarkably, the support for Anzac Day has not waned as this event has receded into the distant past, and as many years have passed since Australia’s last major military conflict. Many young people have shown an interest in recent years, and the centenary of the Gallipoli landing in 2015 attracted great media interest, as well as many people who wanted to go to Gallipoli. But surely many people from overseas (and some Australian-born people also) must be surprised when they discover that 25th April commemorates an invasion which failed, and failed at great cost. The historian A.G.L.Shaw gives the figures of 33,532 killed and 78,578 wounded, including 8,587 killed and 19,367 wounded among the Australians alone. Based on another source, I calculate that this means over 10% killed and almost another 25% injured. Why do we remember this military disaster when many a victory has been forgotten?

Concerning Anzac Day I’m not sure that anyone can offer a full answer to this question – certainly I can’t. But I do have a couple of suggestions to make. The first is that we remember with pride a remarkable demonstration of courage and comradeship, qualities which must have existed before but which were demonstrated to an unusual degree in these unusually harsh circumstances. I think that it is significant that the most widely remembered individual from the Gallipoli conflict is not a brilliant general responsible for effective military strategy, or a courageous soldier responsible for a successful attack, but a man with a donkey. John Simpson went backwards and forwards from the front, carrying wounded soldiers back on his donkey, until he himself was killed. There is now a commemoration stone at his grave which reads: “202 Private J. Simpson, Australian Army Medical Corps. 19th May, 1915. Age 22. He gave his life that others may live.”

Secondly, I think, there is the significance of Gallipoli for people back in Australia. They were deeply stirred by reports of the Anzacs, members of the Australian and New Zealand Army Corps (as I assume were the people of New Zealand), and proud to be their fellow

countrymen. Only fourteen years after Federation, people were given a reason to begin to think of themselves as Australians, not just as British colonials living in Australia. So Gallipoli in 1915 was a scene of terrible loss of life, without military success. But it was also something else, a deeply moving story and a significant moment in Australian history.

For us as Christians, however, I think that there is also something more, something suggested by the inscription on Simpson's memorial stone: "he gave his life that others may live". I want to suggest that there is a real parallel with the Christian gospel. And a reason for us to think that the gospel might strike a chord for many Australians, despite the offensiveness of the Cross to conventional human wisdom.

God's Strange Way of Salvation The Cross *is* offensive to many people who have not come to faith, and difficult even for many who have. "Why this way?" we ask. "Couldn't God have done it some other way?" I don't believe that I can offer a full and final answer to such questions, any more than I can fully explain the power of the Anzac story. But here too there is much that can be said, not to remove the strangeness of the Cross but to see how it fits with the character of God. The Cross is the act of a God who is at once perfectly just and perfectly loving, who willed to accept sinners without treating sin as acceptable. ***Read Romans 3:25-26.*** When we look at the Son of God hanging in agony upon the cross, when we hear him cry, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" - it is then that we see both the seriousness of sin and the greatness of God's love. God saves us not by telling us that our sin doesn't matter, but by showing us how much it matters, and yet taking upon himself through the person of his Son the penalty of that sin.

Strange, but Strangely Moving Such explanations can help those who want to be helped, but they certainly don't silence all objections. So sometimes we are tempted to downplay or even sidestep the Cross when we speak to others about our faith. But I believe that we make a great mistake when we give in to this temptation. We need instead to stand with Paul in what he states so strongly in the passage which was read earlier - ***read 1 Corinthians 1:23-25.*** The Cross does not appeal to human wisdom, indeed it violates human wisdom. But it is the expression of God's wisdom, and it can appeal to people at a level deeper than our reasoning. God declares his love to us in many ways, but nowhere so powerfully as in the Cross - ***read 1 John 4:8-10.*** This love we can and must proclaim to our fellow Australians (and everyone else). But there is one further requirement...

The Demanding Cross It is no accident that the verse in 1 John immediately before the verses which I have just read is this one - ***read 1 John 4:7.*** A similar connection is made in John's Gospel, in words which may have influenced the inscription on John Simpson's memorial stone - ***read John 15:12-13.*** And there are other relevant words a little earlier in John's Gospel - ***read John 13:34-35.***

If we want to see our friends accept the message of the Cross, we don't need to do anything about the message. It is God's message, and it is the Holy Spirit's business to enable people to accept it. But we need to do something about ourselves. People will be much more likely to listen to our message of God's sacrificial love if they see something of sacrificial love in us. I have no doubt that wounded soldiers at Gallipoli would have listened to John Simpson if he wanted to tell them about God's love. People will listen to us if they can see something of Christ in us and in our church.