Heaven on Earth

On the eleventh hour of the eleventh day of the eleventh month a truce was called in the war to end all wars. Well, almost and sort of.

The end was good because after four years, too many lives had already been destroyed or ruined. The lives of the men who fought – and what is known in the military as collateral damage – the women, the aged and the young; their lives ended or forever changed. Many men returned with shell shock, what we now know as PTSD – post traumatic stress disorder.

The men, and the few women who made it close to the front, usually as nurses, were there because they believed that it was the best thing to do. It was what they needed to do to save or keep safe their country and their families. Kill or be killed. Injure or be injured. These were their options.

When the young men from St, John's, Kitchener, enlisted to fight in World War II, the parish gave them copies of *A Shortened Prayer Book*. It was a pocket-sized book containing Morning and Evening Prayer, the Litany, the Catechism, an order for Holy Communion, and the Psalter from the 1662 Book of Common Prayer.

What is noteworthy is the letter pasted into each one from the Rector and Churchwardens of the time, reading: "Dear Friend, — It is with mingled feelings of pride and regret that we write you this note. We regret your absence from our midst, but we are proud of the step you have taken. […] May God be with you and yours till we meet again." It is a mixture of pride and regret recognizing the absence and also the realization that the next time they met may well be on the last day.

It was called "the war to end all wars" for Western Europe, along with their allies and dominions. It was a world war, if your world was western Europe. Although far away, countries like Canada participated because we were part of the British Commonwealth. Much of the world had little knowledge of what was going on and cared even less.

110 years later, we look back and we are in a world with perhaps a different perspective and some very different experiences.

Wars between groups of human beings have taken place ever since humans figured out how to throw a rock or stick at another human to scare them away.

Sadly, as we know it was not the war to end all wars, not even in Europe, never mind the rest of the world. Twenty years later another war would engulf Europe and yet more of the world would be involved.

And wars have continued to take place all around the world.

But humans fighting humans is not God's will for us. Human killing human is certainly not God's will for us.

The good news is that we have been offered another option.

In the beginning … the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters. It was a sea of chaos.

And out of the chaos, "God said, "Let there be light"; and there was light. And God saw that the light was good;" (Genesis 1:3-4)

In six days, God created the heavens and the earth and all their multitude.

Out of the chaos our world was created – the earth, the rocks, the rivers the plants, the birds, the animals and … humans. And it was good.

Yet, we know a different world; we know a world of tears, pain, sadness, darkness, suffering and death.
And the pointless, destructive death and darkness of continued fighting around the world.

Through the arc of God's relationship with creation from the first stories in Genesis to the promise of the Revelation, we have heard a different story, a story of God's enduring concern for all of creation. Much is the story is told through God's relationship with humanity but God's care for the rest of creation shows up in almost every story in one way or another.

We have been promised that heaven is descending to earth, renewing it. The sea of chaos will be no more.

The most common images of heaven are idyllic, pastures, bubbling brooks, beaches or mountains with the sun shining and perhaps a few fluffy clouds. But the reality is that heaven is where God is.

God is at home in the holy city. The holy city is where the people live together depending on each other. Where everyone contributes to the welfare of all. It is a welcome place where people arrive home at the end of a long and confusing journey and where God lives. God will dwell with them, and God "will wipe away every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more." It is a place where there is no more pain or suffering, and burdens that have been carried like a knapsack of rocks can be laid down.

The promise is, "See, I am making all things new." (v5) "To the thirsty I will give water as a gift from the spring of the water of life." (v6)

War has no place in heaven or on earth. War has no place in any country or between any peoples.

We are invited to welcome the new heaven and the new earth, to live in the holy city with God dwelling among us. A place where war is no more.

Thanks be to God for those who loved their family and country. May no one else have to make that sacrifice, anywhere, anytime. Amen.

Readings: John 6:51-58
Wisdom 3:1-9
Ps 3
Rev 21:1-7
Genesis 1:3-4