

I think that this is one of the hardest parish letters that I will ever have to write. Not because I don't believe in what I am writing or because its technically difficult, or because it shouldn't be said. Its hard because I know that its such a tender and sensitive subject, its hard because people I love may not like what I write, its hard because I am as condemned by it as are all of us. The thing is though, and here I swallow, the thing is that the Christian Church is called to be prophetic, to have a voice that is different, to speak into the world with a message that is challenging, troubling and yet liberating.

This letter really is all about a candle, you may have noticed it already. It burns constantly behind the large plate glass window at the front of All Saints Church and it burns for a purpose. Its not been there very long but it will burn continuously for the next 7½ weeks.

It has been hard over Christmas and into the New Year to see the violence between the people of Israel and Palestine. No one, regardless of race or faith, can have failed to have been touched by the loss of life. People of both nations have been killed and the total numbers are staggering. No life is worth more than any other and all lives lost in conflict are a heart break to the Lord and should be a sadness and shame upon mankind. Whether they are lost through the 'legality' of war or through the struggles of terrorism, to leave parents without children and families without fathers is a shame upon us all; children who may as easily have been soldiers as students and fathers who may have been 'freedom fighters' as easily as farmers, loss of life through conflict is a shame upon us all.

It's a Shame that we all must carry and that none of us can leave at the next person's door. Not so long ago the UK was at the forefront of a conflict that is now recognised to have been without legitimate foundation, I refer of course to Iraq. Years and countless deaths in Northern Ireland were the result of historical oppression and deep rooted religious arrogance and intolerance. In the Zimbabwe the world stands by while the cholera death toll climbs steadily beyond two thousand* and the country disintegrates before us.

Any deaths; all deaths which are the result of greed or anger or retaliation or intransigence or oppression or age old disputes do not add glory to a cause, honour to the fallen or victory to a nation whether those deaths be in the cities of Iraq, the fields of Zimbabwe or streets of Gaza.

*Make every effort to live in peace with all men and to be holy;
without holiness no one will see the Lord. (Hebrews chapter 12 v 14)*

We live in a global society that has put little more effort into peace than it did 70 years ago and holiness seems to be a forgotten goal, but then so does the idea of “seeing the Lord.” Over Christmas Christians celebrated the birth of JESUS THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD, we know Jesus as that light that shines in the darkness of a very dark world, a world that so often chooses to shield its eyes from His message of love and peace and forgiveness. We live lives and have outlooks that seem to prefer the shadows of our anger and our violence and our hatred. We sue for money before we sue for peace, we respond with hatred before we reach for holiness and the love and glory of God is diminished within His creation.

And so burns the candle. A candle that will burn an hour for everyone killed in the recent Gaza conflict. The light of Christ came for all the world and so our candle makes no distinction between nationality or faith or age or profession or gender. It’s a flame that burns for all the 1314[#] people who lost their lives in this recent conflict. For 55 days that small light will flicker from our window as we remember the dead and our darkness, it will join the flames at the Arc de Triomphe in Paris, the World Trade Centre memorial in New York, the Hollandsche Schouwburg in Amsterdam, in Yerevan at the Armenian Genocide Memorial and at the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Park in Japan.

But most of all I pray that as we all pass its light we let it burn in our hearts with a new light that shows the way to peace, forgiveness, reconciliation and the way to God.

With love and hope, Rev. Rob Hinton. Vicar of All Saints Hale Barns.

(*World Health organisation. # BBC)