

The cost of our peace

—Daniel Connor

Every Anzac Day, it's still dark when we leave the house.

The suburb is asleep. The streets are empty and cold. My sons and I walk toward the park where the dawn service is held, and they're already in uniform, dressed for a ceremony and not a celebration. They're members of a local cadets unit, and on Anzac Day they have a role to play. They'll march as a drumming contingent later that morning. But first, the dawn service.

The crowd gathers quietly in the gloom. There's no noise, no festivity. People arrive in ones and twos. Some in uniform. Some in civilian clothes with medals on their chest, belonging to themselves or to someone they've loved and lost. All ages. No-one is talking much. The dark and the cold seem to ask for quiet, and people give it.

My boys lower the flags as part of a ceremonial contingent. I watch them in the half-light and think: this is exactly where I want them to be.

Not glory—cost

I don't want my sons to leave Anzac Day with a taste for war. I'm not interested in militarism or in making violence seem romantic. The men and women we remember on this day didn't go to war because war was appealing. They went because something had to be done, and they were the ones who did it.

What I want my sons to carry home is simpler: the understanding that the peace they live in cost something. That it wasn't given to them for free. That somewhere, at some point, someone chose to pay a price they didn't have to pay, and that the people who received the benefit of that sacrifice have a responsibility to remember.

That's what Anzac Day is for: not celebration, but remembrance.

The village that never forgot

There is a small village in northern France called Villers-Bretonneux.

On the night of 24 April 1918, exactly three years to the day after the first Anzac landing at Gallipoli, Australian soldiers retook the village from German forces. A British general later called it perhaps the greatest individual feat of the First World War. More than 1,200 Australians died in that battle. The village was saved.

After the war, schoolchildren in Victoria raised money—collected pennies in classrooms—to rebuild the village school that had been destroyed. The school was renamed Victoria School. It still stands today.

Above every blackboard in every classroom are the words, in French: *N'oublions jamais l'Australie*. Never forget Australia. And in English, written on the school building itself, in capital letters that no child could miss: DO NOT FORGET AUSTRALIA.

The children sitting beneath those words today weren't born when any of this happened. Their grandparents weren't born when any of this happened. And yet every day, in every classroom, above every board, the words are there for them to see. The sacrifice is built into the room. The debt is kept alive, deliberately, generation after generation.

That village understands something about remembrance that I want my sons to understand too. That's why we participate in Anzac Day services every year. I want us to pause and remember the cost of the freedom we enjoy here in Australia. But it's not just physical or political freedom that I want my family to remember.

Greater love

The night before he was crucified, Jesus said this to his disciples: *'Greater love has no-one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends.'* (John 15:13)

He was talking about himself. He knew what the next day held, and he went to it willingly, because we needed what only his death could give us: peace with God. Forgiveness of sins. The barrier that our sins created between us and our Creator removed, once and for all.

The soldiers of Anzac went into battle knowing some of them would not come back. They did it for people they'd never met, for villages they'd never seen, for a peace they might not live to enjoy. That is a kind of love worth honouring.

Jesus did something far greater. The peace he purchased doesn't end. The freedom he secured is not temporary. The people who live in that freedom, who did nothing to earn it, have been given the same instruction the children of Villers-Bretonneux received. Remember. Don't let the cost disappear into the comfortable background of ordinary life.

Remembering the cost

We and our children are living in the freedom that Christ's death purchased. That is a gift worth everything. But gifts that are never traced back to their source are gifts that lose their meaning. A person who knows the peace without knowing what it cost will struggle to feel the weight of grace.

The French village wrote it above the blackboard. We need to find our own way of doing the same: making sure that we and our children know, in plain and repeated terms, that the life we have come at a price.

It starts with the ordinary habits: prayer, reading Scripture, and taking the time to talk with the next generation about what they actually understand. Do they know why Jesus died? Can they say, in their own words, what his death means for their sins? Do they understand that the gift on the other side of the cross is eternal life, peace with God, freedom that has no end? These are not questions for a church exam. They are conversations for the everyday moments.

Remembrance is not passive. It's a discipline. It has to be practised and passed on.

The suburb will be asleep when we leave the house this Anzac Day. It'll be awake and ordinary by the time we get home. What happens in the dark, in the cold, with the flags and the quiet crowd: that's what I want my sons to carry with them when the day moves on.

Don't forget what it cost. Nothing in life will matter more than knowing that.

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