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## Thoughts About Poppies *by Pauline Grimshaw*

To help us remember things, we often need calendars and diaries or scribbled notes to act as prompts. On Remembrance Sunday these mainly take the form of poppies, either individual ones, wreathed ones or the ones on small crosses. On Remembrance Sunday perhaps some of us remember those in our own family who fought and ultimately gave their lives in war. I often look at our memorial tablet and see the names of five sons of previous ministers at our own church.

As we remember those we might have known and that are dear to us, we should also give thanks that we today, unlike so many others in this world live our lives in safety and without fear. With memories of wars there should also be resolution- a resolution that the events that led to war should never be repeated.

To return to poppies, these used to be common flowers on roadside verges and on the verges of

meadows and fields. Now we very rarely see poppies in the countryside (at least round here!) - changes in farming methods and weed-killers have polished most of them off. Yet during the course of my travels earlier this year, I passed a roadside, where the soil had been turned over in preparation for building and there were masses of blooming poppies. Poppy seeds are tiny and insignificant and one would think they would easily perish, yet these tiny seeds are amazing. They can lie dormant in soil undisturbed for years until the soil is turned over and then they are shocked, as it were, into life again. In France in the First World War the churning up of the ground produced the most wonderful masses of red poppies. These poppies are the symbols that help us to remember the physical effects of war but they also help us to understand the cause of wars both spiritual and natural.

We often think of the poppy in terms of its flower but perhaps we should also think of the correspondence of seeds. Here is a quotation by a French philosopher Albert Camus, "We used to wonder where war lived, what it was that made it so vile. And now we realise that we know where it lives, that it is inside ourselves." Yes, war is rather like a seed inside each and every one of us-like poppy seeds hidden under the soil of our outer being, seeds in the depth of our souls. The seeds of evil, mixed in with the good seed in our minds lie in all of us awaiting the opportunity to germinate. There are times in all our lives, when circumstances affect us or perhaps when we are going through states of temptation that the wrong sorts of seeds seem to grow and blossom almost overnight.

What are these seeds of war, those evil seeds within us all? What is war and what causes it? People have often blamed God. The writings of our church state, "It is not of the Divine Providence that wars take place but the life's love of man has become of such a nature that it wishes to exercise dominion over others." We may not think that we as individuals exercise dominion over others, but in everyday terms to us it means 'Getting our own way'. And let's face it we all think, at times that we know best, and we all like getting our own way. It's a part of us that we have to overcome when we try to love our neighbour as ourself. A country on a much larger scale is the sum of individuals and just as individuals like their own way so also do countries and their rulers. Look around at the world today and see how many individual rulers try to get what they want, regardless of others, including their own people.

Wars are the earthly result of the struggle between good and evil. If good and evil did not exist mankind would not have the freedom to live as if of themselves. Long ago I remember watching a film about Jason and the Argonauts. It began with the Gods on Mount Olympus determining the fate of Jason and his men and controlling them like puppets. The Lord does not seek to control our fate like the Greek Gods of legend. The human race lives on this earth with the consequences of the actions that it takes, but the Lord, OUR God, tries to ensure the best possible outcome of our actions without

taking away our free will even though from our own perspective this does not appear to be the case.

So, as we remember past wars and suffering and past mistakes may we all do our best to live our lives as best as we possibly can. May we encourage the good seeds in our lives to blossom and bloom as the poppies and remind us of all the beauty and goodness that is in this world.

