



**Saint Thomas Church Fifth Avenue  
in the City of New York**

**The Reverend Canon Carl F. Turner, Rector**  
[www.SaintThomasChurch.org](http://www.SaintThomasChurch.org)

**Sunday, November 11, 2018**  
*Remembrance Sunday*

*Solemn Requiem Eucharist*  
*at 11 am*

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A Sermon by  
The Reverend Canon Carl F. Turner, *Rector*

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### *BUILDING BELOVED COMMUNITY*

The clergy of our parish and our four lay delegates have just returned from the 242<sup>nd</sup> Diocesan Convention which was unlike any convention that I have attended in *any* Diocese before. It was as powerful as it was moving; it was as challenging as it was inspirational. It began with two very uncomfortable subjects explored through drama and liturgy: First, reflections on our own church's involvement in the slave trade in this country and, secondly, our church's response to the growing *Me Too* movement which has revealed our church's struggle to face up to allegations of abuse perpetrated over many years by some of the clergy, and even some of the bishops.

What became clear was the danger of doing or saying nothing by which we complicity approve of injustice or even crimes.

As I said, it was uncomfortable but, it was the right place to start for a conference that had as its theme, "*Building the Beloved Community*".

In his 1957 speech, 'Birth of A New Nation', Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. said these words: "*The aftermath of nonviolence is the creation of the beloved community. The aftermath of nonviolence is redemption. The aftermath of nonviolence is reconciliation. The aftermath of violence is emptiness and bitterness.*"

Reconciliation can only begin when we tackle those feelings of emptiness and bitterness and that means acknowledging what has happened to cause this enmity in the first place. For example, it was at the heart of Archbishop Desmond Tutu's plan following the end of apartheid in South Africa - not arrests, recrimination and revenge but, paradoxically, a 'truth and reconciliation commission'; Tutu was attempting to build a Beloved Community.

Many of you will know the versions of Martin Niemöller's poem '*Then they came for me.*' I say versions because there is no definitive version as it is based on speeches he gave as a Lutheran Pastor after his release from a Nazi concentration camp at the end of the Second World War. He was a complicated person; like many in Germany after the end of the First World War, he initially supported Hitler as the potential savior of his people only to find himself arrested by the Gestapo.

Here's the version from the New England Holocaust memorial:

*"They came first for the Communists,  
and I didn't speak up because I wasn't a Communist.  
Then they came for the Jews,*

*and I didn't speak up because I wasn't a Jew.  
Then they came for the trade unionists,  
and I didn't speak up because I wasn't a trade unionist.  
Then they came for the Catholics,  
and I didn't speak up because I was a Protestant.  
Then they came for me,  
and by that time no one was left to speak up."*

We began our liturgy today by honoring the names of the 20 members of our own parish family who made the supreme sacrifice for the cause of peace and justice because, on this day, we commemorate the centenary of the end of the First World War - the first Armistice Day - which began at the eleventh hour of the eleventh day of the eleventh month. I encourage you to go and look at the First World War memorial at the back of our church today or this week, where a lamp will burn for the rest of this month as we recall the horror of the war that was meant to end all war. As you look at the memorial, reflect on the very large number of names of parishioners who served their country – 335 of them – including the, then, Rector Dr Stires, who went to France as a YMCA chaplain. As you look at the names you will see 20 that are highlighted in gold leaf; they are the ones that we read at the beginning of mass.

The First World War is often called the Great War, not because that war is, somehow, to be glorified but because of the horrific nature of it: 37 million casualties; 10 million military personnel deaths and a shocking 7 million civilian deaths. 2 million people died from disease alone, and a staggering 6 million people went missing, presumed dead. 20 million people were injured.

Did Stires think war was a great thing? Did all his parishioners agree with even going to war? I very much doubt it. But he could not stay silent in the face of injustice and he and 335 members of our parish refused to ignore it and 20 of them never came back to sit in the pews that you are sitting in today.

*"Then they came for me,  
and by that time no one was left to speak up."*

When the memorial was unveiled, Stires had left Saint Thomas to become Bishop of Long Island and he returned to preach at the dedication of the memorial. At that time, some in America were stirring up animosity between Great Britain and the United States but Stires would have none of it and, according to our archives, he launched an attack from this very pulpit on those stirring trouble: *"Stronger than the tie of blood and the bond of common speech,"* said Dr Stires, *"is our kinship of spirit. For the Declaration of Independence is the child of Magna Carta; and the lion's whelp was true to the call of the blood in its veins."*

To build a beloved community requires first a reflection on the brokenness of humanity and the brokenness of the Church; that in spite of great technological and medical advances, violence is still the preferred way for too many in our world. To build a beloved community requires us to look deep into our own brokenness and to reach out to God for help. To build a Beloved Community is a *process* and not an end in itself for we are required, as Dr. King knew only too well, to take to heart the challenge of Jesus Christ which to many in our world seems like a contradiction: Jesus said, *"But I say to you that listen, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you. If anyone strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also; and from anyone who takes away your coat do not withhold even your shirt. Give to everyone who begs from you; and if anyone takes away your goods, do not ask for them again. Do to others as you would have them do to you."*  
(Luke 6:27-31)

And Jesus set the example; Jesus is the way to true peace. The way of Jesus is the only way for us to live as the Beloved Community. The way of Jesus brings true reconciliation, for even from the cross Jesus summed up the anguish of so many unnecessary deaths over countless years and the years that would come with the words *"My God, My God, why hast thou forsaken me?"*

Today, my friends, we remember. It is right to remember. It is right to teach our children and our grandchildren to remember. It is also right to celebrate this remembrance in a mass with hopeful hearts that, in spite of our own brokenness, we will attempt even in, yes, faltering ways to create a Beloved Community in this place where Christ rules and who will come again and put an end to and violence once and for all.

*“The aftermath of nonviolence is the creation of the beloved community.”*

Jesus said, *“Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.”*

Let us pray.

Eternal God, in whose perfect kingdom no sword is drawn but the sword of righteousness, no strength known but the strength of love: So mightily spread abroad your Spirit, that all peoples may be gathered under the banner of the Prince of Peace, as children of one Father; to whom be dominion and glory, now and for ever. Amen.