

Do you know what they say that the first casualty is in any war? It's the truth. The truth about things very soon becomes hard to see. And that's often intentional.

I think the same might be said about elections. Both sides of the election in America had their own way of spinning the truth, and the media didn't make things any clearer. I heard an interview with a father and son on the radio. The dad was voting for Trump and the son for Clinton. Thankfully they were not one of the families who had really fallen out over the election - they had talked a lot. The father was asked where he got his information from. He said, definitely not from the papers or the TV - he didn't trust any of them.

I think that whichever way we voted in the referendum - if we were old enough to vote - we may have felt the same way. Getting at the real truth about the EU and the consequences of Brexit was not easy - and neither the politicians nor the media were much help. I suspect that most of us ended up following our gut instinct.

But it is dangerous if we lose hold on the truth. Following our gut instinct can only get us so far. We can be easily swayed by our prejudices - and our prejudices tend to become more pronounced when we're in an argument - or at least mine do. We can end up making decisions based on fear, or anger, and allowing our rational views to become clouded.

So maybe today, as we look back on the consequences of war and conflict, and we remember those who have given their lives for freedom and for truth, maybe it is a good day to look at what is true for us in all of this.

The first truth we might remember today is that war is terrible. When I was young we use to get comic strips about war heroics, and now we have computer games like Medal of Honour, and it can all seem very exciting and stirring, from a distance. But war always brings a terrible cost.

I don't know if any of you saw on television the 19,240 little figures wrapped in shrouds and laid out on the grass in front of Bristol Cathedral. They cover a huge area, just as miniature figures. Imagine if they were full size. They represent those who died just on one day, in one battle - on the first day of the battle of the Somme.

Imagine all those lives ended - and all those families devastated - and then multiply that number many many times for all those killed in conflict in the last 100 years.

And many more have come home with life changing injuries - some physical, some mental. You might have seen Stewart's story on the TV - he was blown up in Afghanistan, and although he made it home and his injuries were less serious than some, he was deeply affected by his experiences, so much so that he got very, very close to walking into the sea to end his life.

Thankfully he didn't, and his wife and the British Legion helped him find help, but his life will never be the same.

When we hear the names read out down at our memorial today, and we imagine the effect of each of those deaths, and then of all of those deaths on this village, we remember the truth that war is terrible.

But we can also remember today the truth that peace is possible. We live in a time of peace, for our country - and that includes peace with other countries who were our implacable enemies. As some of you know, my brother works for Coventry Cathedral. Every year he visits the German city of Dresden. Both Coventry and Dresden were devastated by bombing in the Second World War - Dresden by allied bombers and Coventry by German bombers. But now Coventry and Dresden are twinned - their citizens have become friends.

When we look at some conflicts, it is hard to believe that peace will ever come - but stories like this remind us that it can. People can learn to forgive. The hard work of reconciliation can be done. And for that we can be hugely thankful.

Looking at the history of human conflict, we might want to remember another truth today. Humans are by nature fallible. 'All's fair in love and war' they say - and war certainly can bring out the worst in us. But so can any conflict. When did you last have an argument with

someone - a serious argument? Did you think at the time that you were completely in the right, and they were completely in the wrong? Maybe, away from the argument, you became a little less certain, but in the heat of conflict we tend to judge others rather than ourselves. Faced with some very judgmental religious people Jesus said this; 'Before you try to take the splinter out of your enemies' eye, take the log out of your own eye.'

It's sometimes easier for us if we see the world as divided into goodies and baddies - with us on the goodies side. The media certainly like to present us with that sort of story - next time you look at a paper, notice how many of the articles are encouraging you to judge someone else, and to condemn them. Maybe we partly buy the papers because reading stories like that makes us feel better about ourselves - we all like to have someone to blame, someone to have a go at - whether it's Donald Trump or Tony Blair, Boris Johnson or Jeremy Corbyn. It's somehow comforting for us to get together with those who agree with us, and all attack or mock our favourite hate figures - Facebook can be proof of that.

So when we stop and think about it, we know that we have within ourselves some pretty negative and sometimes nasty attitudes. Whatever we think of the others, we are not perfect either - we are all fallible.

And one last truth that it is important to remember today. Every human person is valuable. We put names onto our

war memorials and read them out to honour each of those individual men and women. Each one's life was precious. Each one was loved - by those who knew them, we hope, and certainly by God.

And that is true also for each of the 400,000 people killed in the war in Syria that is still going on. Their names will never be put on a war memorial. Men, women, children, their lives ended either as soldiers or civilians - but each precious, each loved.

We cannot bring them back - but we can remember that the 5 million people whose homes have been destroyed and whose country is unrecognisable - do a Google search for the before and after pictures of the city of Aleppo if you want to see it. We can remember that they too are precious human beings. It doesn't make our national policies easy to decide - but it should make a crucial difference to the way we think about these people.

So those are four truths that we might want to remember today. War is terrible. Peace is possible. We are all fallible. Each human life is valuable and infinitely precious.

Perhaps you would want to focus on different truths today. There was an album by the Manic Street Preachers with the title: 'This is my truth, tell me yours'. What is your truth? What are the truths on which you base your life?

We can be so easily deceived. The prophet Ezekiel raged against those court prophets whose visions were lies and whose predictions were false - it sounds a bit like the opinion polls. He says 'The prophets mislead my people by saying all is well. All is certainly not well!'

Is all well in our culture? It's easy to be lulled into the idea when we have the new iPhone 7 in our pocket. I read this by the former chief Rabbi, Jonathan Sacks, on Friday: 'When religion dies and consumerism takes its place, people are left with a culture that encourages them to buy things they don't need with money they don't have for a happiness that won't last. It is a bad exchange and it will end in tears.' Are we being deceived by those who tell us that things bring us happiness? That money is more important than people? Do we sometimes live our lives as if this is true?

It takes courage to speak out for the truth. The meeting between Jesus of Nazareth and Pontius Pilate is a good example. One has power, but not courage. Pilate knows there is nothing in the charges against Jesus, but in the end he allows an innocent man to die, because he is afraid of the crowd causing trouble. 'What is truth' he says, and then washes his hands.

Jesus has no power - he stands there before Pilate, a condemned man. But he has courage - he will not flinch from telling the truth, even when it leads him into danger. And in the end, the truth will out.

It also takes courage to look at the truth about ourselves. It's uncomfortable. A bit like looking for too long in the mirror. We don't always like what we see.

But looking hard at ourselves and at our lives is the only way to check if we building our lives on what is really important, or putting up a wall of loose stones and painting it with whitewash. And now is surely a time when we as a country should also look hard at ourselves and ask what is the truth about us? What are our values? What are the things we believe in? And do we live out those values in our life together?

We remember people of courage today - people who have fought and died for the sake of others. One thing we can do, to honour them, is to have courage ourselves - courage to question and to challenge and to seek and to struggle and maybe to pray so that we can find our truth.

For me, that truth is most deeply found in the man who stood before Pilate and demonstrated the power of unarmed truth. I find the story of Jesus - what he did and what he said - to be an ever deepening source of truth in my life. But I believe that anyone who seeks truth with all his or her heart will find it. What is your truth?