Here I am. Send me
Remembrance Sunday, November 8 2026
Isaiah 6:1-8; Matthew 5:1-10
Very Rev Susan Brown, locum minister

Preamble

I want to share with you the words of a song that tells just a tiny piece of the story of the only Scottish person to die in Auschwitz.

This woman has gone down in the history books – and she would be now a part of the international presbytery – to which Geneva too belongs.

Jane Haining was brought up in the Scottish borders. She then moved to Paisley to work in the Coates thread factory, before caring for Christian and Jewish girls in a school in Budapest, Hungary - where the Scots Kirk still meets – and where presbytery met just a few weeks ago.

Jane cared for those she called 'her girls' – but the son of the school's cook betrayed her to the Gestapo.

Why? For crying as she sewed the mandatory yellow stars onto her Jewish girls' clothes.

The song telling Jane's story is a hauntingly beautiful lullaby to the too many children who have lost and who continue to lose their lives in wars which are nothing to do with them. The song together with pictures of Jane Haining and her girls, can be found on YouTube.

I will play you a snatch and then read you the words, written by a current Scottish singer/writer, Karine Polwart.

BALEERIE BALOO
I know the warp of a thread
Of fibres and filaments silver and red
But these golden stars
Are blood on my hands
Baleerie, baleerie baloo

I cradled you all in the sun
I cradle you still, though the day is done
And these golden stars
Swallow the light
Baleerie, baleerie baloo

Tomorrow is sealed with a sigh
And I am betrayed by the tear in my eye
And these golden stars
Have fallen to earth
Baleerie, baleerie baloo…

So hush ma wee lammie, don't weep
A far gentler hand will soon lull you to sleep
And these golden stars
Will shine for you and I
Baleerie, baleerie baloo
Lulay…
Hush…

Today we remember…

We remember where warring leads.

And pray – *earnestly* pray - that swords will be beaten into ploughshares and spears into pruning hooks, and that nation will no longer take up the sword against nation – and will study war no more. *(Isaiah 2:4/Micah 4:3)*

Reflection

Isaiah was the name of the man who had that weird dream we heard about earlier – with six-winged creatures flying around… and burning coals touching his lips… and all against a cinematic backdrop of shaking ancient temple pillars… and *singing* loud enough to lift the rafters – as well as billows of smoke for even more effect!

And what was the point of all the drama?

It seems God wanted to ask Isaiah a question.

God wanted to know if Isaiah would be willing to *go* wherever he sent him and would Isaiah *do* what God would ask him to do.

"Who will go for me?" God had asked Isaiah in his dream. And Isaiah had responded by putting his hand up in the air and saying…. "Here am I… Send me…"

A *terrifying* leap into the unknown awaited Isaiah – but still the prophet responded with an "Here am I. Send me!"

112 years ago and then again just over 20 years later, people across much of western Europe, were asked a very similar question – not by *God*… but by their nation.

Governments asked – who will go for us? Who will do what *we* think needs to be done? And many people put their hands up and responded with a 'Send me.' – they joined their armed forces – or the home defences.

Wars however, and especially the first world war, carry a heavy cost in terms of personnel – and what began as a *request* to serve, very quickly became a *demand* – and with no dramatic visions to inspire people – *and* (let's face it) with no real *choice*… men mainly (and women after 1941) got a letter through their letter box *telling* them, whether they wanted to or not, their nation was *sending* them to war.

Those ordinary people fought on *both* sides… And many (too many) were killed, with those who survived carrying forever the scars of what they had seen and done.

I am so glad never to have had that experience. And I hope and I pray that future generations will never have that experience either.

But I also know that those worst of times can also bring out the best in people.

There are many, *many* stories of people doing utterly unselfish things during the wars; stories of people who put their own lives at risk for the sake of others.

There are tales of heroics in the air… on the seas… and in the trenches… It seems every regiment and squadron and ships' crew - have their tales to tell. And some of them will take your breath away.

That courage though, is not restricted to those in uniform alone. As well as those out in the field - there were others who also did what they felt needed to be done in ways that were incredibly brave and completely unselfish.

I'm thinking of those who picked up the pieces domestically (sometimes literally) – and of those who formed the resistance…

But I'm also thinking of that Scottish lady who died in Auschwitz.

Jane Haining, was employed as a house mother by the Church of Scotland, in the Church's school for Jewish and Christian girls in Budapest as I said earlier. When the 2nd World War broke out, Jane was on leave back in Scotland and although the Church didn't want her to return to Budapest, Jane insisted on going.

When things grew worse, the Church *demanded* she return to Scotland, and again, Jane refused. She wrote back saying: "If my girls need me in days of sunshine, how much more do they need me in days of rain."

The girls loved her. She was strict but fair.

How do I know? Because I had the privilege of meeting some of those little girls whom Miss Haining had looked after.

When I met them, back in 2016, they were all in their late 80s and 90s but they were happy to talk about what Miss Haining was like – *and* of the day the soldiers came to get her.

She was arrested, as we heard in the song, because she'd shed tears as she'd sewn the yellow stars of David onto the clothes of the Jewish girls.

What we didn't hear was why the son of the school cook betrayed her. Apparently, Jane had told him off for stealing the girls' food… so he'd reported her to the authorities.

The ladies, Jane's girls, remember standing, as little ones, huddled in the stairwell of the school crying as Miss Haining was taken off – and her turning to them and telling them not to worry, she would be back by lunch.

The whole school had then been hurriedly evacuated - and the girls sent to family out in the country.

Most of them had grown up not knowing what happened to Miss Haining – until fairly recently.

Jane had been sent in a cattle-truck, to Auschwitz. And within an hour of arriving, she was dead.

All because she refused to stop doing what she felt God was asking her to do – to care for ***his***, as well as her, girls.

Who will go for me?, God had asked Isaiah. Who will go and care for my people? God had asked Jane Haining.

Here am I, they answered, send me.

As we remember the enormous price that war extracts and the extraordinary courage and selflessness of so many, let's hear God's voice – as he asks ***us***.... who will go for me to fight as hard to ***keep*** the peace... as others did to win it?

Will you?