

You will almost certainly know the names of Winston Churchill, Adolf Hitler, Joseph Stalin, and Benito Mussolini. You are probably familiar with Charles de Gaulle, F D Roosevelt and Neville Chamberlain; those who have read a book or two may even be familiar with Chiang Kaishek, Paul Reynaud and Hideki Tojo. It is unlikely that you will have ever heard the name of Yang Kyoungjong yet in a strange way the story of the young Korean man with that name tells us far more about world war than any account of national leaders bestriding the world stage or field marshals fretting about military strategy.

In 1938, at the age of eighteen Yang was forcibly conscripted by the occupying Japanese force in Korea into an army assembled to invade China: a year later he was captured by the Soviets and sent to a labour camp, only to be forcibly conscripted into the Red Army in 1942 before being captured in 1943 in the Ukraine by the German army, into which he was, by now almost inevitably, forcibly conscripted. Finally, in 1944 he was captured by the British during the invasion of Normandy and so ended his involuntary military career. Yang's wartime experience is an astonishing tale, no less remarkable or memorable for being entirely irrelevant in the wider war itself. But so much more than maps and charts, and tables it tells us something meaningful about what happens when the world goes to war.

War moves on the implacable tectonic plates of history, and the academic historians can spin the web of causes and ramifications, supply lines and strategies, but it happens between and to human beings, and it is the human side that we really understand and so most easily remember.

Take the First World War. The statistics of the Great War are mind-boggling: sixteen million dead, twenty million wounded. More than a million casualties in the one battle, the First Battle of the Somme. These are numbers so immense as to be almost meaningless: what does a million dead really mean? Or look or feel like?

We know that it is a lot of people, but we don't truly understand what that means until we stand in front of the war memorial in a tiny village in the back of nowhere and read just one of the names of those who didn't come back. It is an ordinary name. The name of your neighbour, your friend, a family member. Then, war is personal, then it is, in one sense understandable. Statistics are numbers, but names are people.

We may know, intellectually, that six and a half million dead in Nazi concentration camps is a horror beyond telling: not until we see the piles of shoes at Dachau are

our emotions overwhelmed. When it is personal, we can start to understand. For those who have experienced it, war is overwhelmingly a personal experience.

That we understand best in human and personal terms is everywhere to see: it is not only something that helps us to get a grasp on the immense events and megalith horrors of war. If a campaigner wants to really get your support, they won't throw statistics at you, they will tell you a personal story, they will give the problem they want you to help solve a name and a face. When we study the scriptures, it is the stories about people in the Gospels and Acts that make the most vivid impact on us, not the soaring theology of say, Romans or John; it is the family dramas and sagas we all remember from the Old Testament: David and Daniel, Ruth and Rahab, not the commandments and genealogies.

Today, we keep Remembrance Sunday in Church. For many in the world this seems strange. Is not Christ the Prince of Peace? Do we not claim to worship the God who would teach us to beat our swords into ploughshares, our spears into pruning hooks? Well yes, but then, whatever this day may mean elsewhere, we do not here celebrate the abstractions of war and nationhood— our country, its military victories, the vanquishing of its enemies, the Union flag. What we remember is individuals, those millions, sons and daughters, lovers and spouses, parents and friends; the kith and kin who were here and then were not, who went and never came back. We do that in church, because, whatever the causes fought for or against, whatever the injustices perpetrated, whatever the unspeakable terrors endured, individuals matter. We know that: when the Good Shepherd leaves the ninety-nine on the hill side to search for that one lost sheep, we know that individuals count. And you count to a million, sixteen, twenty million one at a time and each one of the war dead we pray for today at this Requiem were made in the image of God; those dead of two world wars, each the brother or sister of Christ.

War is a uniquely human tragedy, and Jesus the uniquely human God. When God became incarnate in Jesus, all human experience was taken up into him. Not approved or disapproved, condoned or condemned: taken up. This is the heart of the matter, the living, pulsing heart of our faith. Christianity makes so much sense, it tells us so much about God, speaks directly to our hearts, because written right the way through it like the proverbial stick of Brighton Rock is a name, the name of a human being who lived, loved, breathed and died; who, give or take two thousand years of cultural difference, did the things we do, experienced what we do, felt as we do. A human being with an everyday name that, give or take two thousand years of cultural

difference, you might see, beaten in bronze or carved in marble, washed with decade after decade of rain, slowly smoothed away by the touch of the years, on the side of a memorial in a list of those lost in action.

Unlike our older and younger siblings in the monotheistic faiths we don't, as Christians, have the rules and regulations, those statutes and ordinances that if we keep them will keep that scary God off our backs and safely up in heaven looking the other way. Our God is incarnate, Emmanuel, God is with us, here, on earth, and there's just no way we can keep him safely away up there. He's *always* in your face, upfront and personal. However high we rise, however noble our aspirations; however low we sink, however shameful our actions; in the humdrum of life and the horrors of war; if we had but the eyes to see we could turn any time to see Him right there alongside us.

*"Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? "*

You can understand Christianity as a philosopher, but most of us don't. You can understand our faith as a series of intellectual propositions to which the believer must assent, but it isn't. You can understand our faith as a list of do's and don't's but you would be wrong. But if you understand Christianity as the person who is Jesus Christ, then, my friend, you've got it.

After a short period in a British POW camp, Yang Kyoungjong emigrated to the United States, and understandably, dedicated his remaining time to living an uneventful life and forgetting his wartime experiences. He died peacefully in Illinois in 1992.

I don't know if Yang ever prayed: I'd be surprised if he didn't- most of us do when we are in danger or terrified, and Yang must have spent a lot of time in the war years being both. Whether he prayed to Jesus or even knew his name then, I don't know. But for Yang Kyoungjong and all those millions caught up in the world wars, when the bombs fell, when the letter from the King came, when the houses that were there yesterday were gone in the morning, when their comrades died at their side, when the bullet with their name on found its target; in the cities, on the oceans and in the air, in the prisons and death camps, on the beaches and battlefields: if they had but the eyes to see, they would have seen Jesus right there alongside.