We gather on the 11th hour of the 11th day of the 11th month each year to commemorate the anniversary of Armistice Day in 1918 – the end of a conflict that was supposed to be 'the war to end all wars'. Given what's happened since – including, sadly, events of the last 12 months – it seems naively optimistic for us to have thought that we'd somehow seen an end to human conflict over a hundred years ago.

But the truth is that it wasn't just in 1918 that we allowed ourselves to believe that enduring peace might be a real possibility. I remember sitting pretty much where you are now – albeit on the other side of the country and *many* years ago! – as a high school student in Queensland in 1989 watching the fall of the Berlin Wall and with it, an end to the Cold War and the very real threat of nuclear annihilation that had accompanied the previous few decades. This was an event so profound that political scientist Francis Fukuyama referred to it as 'the end of history'- with the fall of the Soviet Union and the collapse of communism, Fukuyama was suggesting that the ideological struggle that humankind had been fighting over for centuries prior had been resolved with one clear outcome – western liberal democracy had prevailed. And for a while this certainly seemed to be the case. I vividly remember watching David Hasselfhoff singing on top of the crumbling remnants of the Berlin Wall and thinking that this *must* be the official moment that the good guys won – after all, surely there can be no clearer concession of Soviet defeat than to allow the guy from Baywatch - the Hoff! - to sing his terrible big hair power ballads, while wearing a flashing leather jacket and a piano keyboard scarf, on top of the remnants of the most prominent symbol of their division from the West.

I joined the Army a few years later and for a while things seemed to be continuing to trend towards everlasting peace. The world was joining like never before, with powerful forces like globalisation and the internet creating dependency, connection and understanding across the planet in a way never before witnessed. As an aside, it is probably interesting to note that I did my entire high school education and undergraduate degree before I had access to the internet. Which meant if I needed some knowledge, I was limited to whatever books happened to be in the local library, or whatever 'facts' my parents and teachers told me – all of which, in 1980s South-East Queensland, were pretty dubious sources. And forget AI - the only 'Claude' I had access to was this kid in my class from a farm who used to eat crayons!

Either way, these connecting forces emerging in the late '80s and early '90s seemed to mean that peace might just endure, a state of affairs reinforced by what economist Thomas Friedman called 'the Golden Arches Theory of Conflict Prevention'; the, at the time very true, observation that no two countries who both had a McDonalds restaurant had ever been to war with each other. During these years, when we gathered to commemorate the fallen on Remembrance Day, we could almost allow ourselves to believe that their sacrifice had laid the path for a peaceful future.

Except, of course, that it hasn't turned out that way at all. On the 24th of February 2022, McDonalds Moscow invaded McDonalds Kyiv, shattering the Golden Arches theory and seeing a return to state-on-state conflict in Europe and a trench-based attrition warfare the likes of which we had not witnessed since the muddy, bloody battlefields of the First World War that the original Armistice Day put an end to. Alongside this we've witnessed a broader decline in the global world order, a rise in nationalism and a return of the spectre of nuclear war. If history had in fact ended in the late '80s as Francis Fukuyama suggested, it certainly seems to have restarted with a vengeance in the last few years.

BUT! The whole point of noting this is not to be depressing. It seems that conflict has been a sad but enduring characteristic of the human condition ever since we split off as a separate species some 300,000 years ago. But there are also a whole bunch of other characteristics that have accompanied

this for all time, and which endure to this day. Things like beauty, love, kindness, innovation, connectedness and humour. And so I ask that as we commemorate Remembrance Day this year, we take time to reflect on, and remember, a few things.

The first is to remember how lucky we are to be living in this amazing country. Yes, there is ugliness and threat in various places across the globe, but alongside these there is also no shortage of beauty and hope, and we seem to have gotten more than our fair share of these in this country, and in particular in our beautiful little pocket of it here in the south-west.

But the second to remember is that these freedoms and the lifestyle that we enjoy here in Australia are not inevitable, and are certainly not guaranteed. Instead, they require people to actively work for them and to protect them. They require a recognition that alongside the amazing individual rights we enjoy stands a requirement to fulfill collective responsibilities, and it is up to each of us to do our part to ensure this happens. And I really stress that this is not just through military service, but in all walks of life. In my opinion, all those who are truly living as 'people for others' are actively working to uphold our end of this bargain.

And so I ask that you continue to look for ways that you can do this – in manners great and small. I ask that when you see someone less fortunate than you, you remember to choose kindness over cynicism. That when you hear an opinion you disagree with, you remember to choose curiosity over retaliation. And, most of all, that you genuinely look to carry forward the amazing lessons that you've been taught here at JTC into broader aspects of your life. That you remember to be people for others. That you remember to offer service, in the example of Pope John XXIII. And that you remember to always seek justice, in the manner of the fallen who have gone before us, and who we gather to commemorate each year on Remembrance Day.

Lest we forget.