

VE Day, commemorated every year on the 8th May is one of those memorial dates that is often overlooked in our country. However in what was, in the time of the last war, Occupied Europe, this day is still annually a day of national remembrance as the day that peace and freedom broke out after some 5 years of armed conflict and oppression. We do keep the time of Remembrance on 11th November as recognition of those who lost their lives serving their country in times of war since 1914, but VE Day has a very different focus. For this day in particular not only looks back and remembers all who were affected by the time of conflict but also holds the vision of peace and the opportunities for reconciliation that many hoped for after the dark days of the war. For us who were not alive back in 1945 this day can seem a little distant, not part of the people we are today in the 21st century.

I suggest that such an attitude is dangerous as it removes the wisdom of experience, and forgets that the peace heralded in 1945 can be, and often has been, mismanaged and broken, seen in conflicts in the subsequent years. I was born in 1948 a time of hope mixed with fear as we coped with the economic damage of war and the rising threat of nuclear conflict. I carry with me two names, Richard and Geoffrey, and both of these young men were killed during the war. Richard, who was killed in action in 1943, was a close RAF squadron friend of my father, and Geoffrey, my Mother's only brother who died as a POW forced to work on the notorious Burma railway. The understanding that I now carry the hopes and opportunities in my life that they were denied gives me sense of the need to hold carefully that vision of peace and reconciliation.

As we either watch, listen or maybe join in the 75th commemorations of VE day, maybe we can hold in the lives we have been given, not only the thanks for the sacrifices made in the last war both on the home and overseas fronts, but also ask how we can be active participants in those visions I mentioned of peace and reconciliation. This is not any easy task; life can throw many challenges that can upset and sometimes destroy hopes that we carry.

The Bible gives much advice and challenge to us as we seek our way in the world, and two passages, suggested for church services at this time, pick up the messages of hope and reconciliation.

Micah Chapter 4 verses 1-4 give the prophet's vision of the peace that comes only through God; verse 2 tells us "many nations shall come and say: 'Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; that he may teach us his ways, and that we may walk in his paths.'

2 Corinthians Chapter 5 verses 17-19 Paul tells us; "if anyone is in Christ the new creation has come the old has gone, the new is here!

All this is from God who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; that the world was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting peoples' sins against them, and he has committed to us the message of reconciliation".

At this time in particular as our nation, and the world, cope with the effects of the Covid19 virus, people often refer to the 'wartime spirit', looking back sometimes through rose coloured lenses at a time of unified effort and tolerance and hope for victory. We know through contemporary accounts that wartime life was hard, it brought unbelievable pressures on individuals as well as families, and underneath the nation's resolve to be united against what was seen as the enemy, there were the fears that often affected many lives. We can see such fears today as the nations deal with the Covid19 virus, and we need to hold firmly to the hope we have in the Son of God, the one who gives us the vision of hope in spite of the situations we face.

Coming back to VE Day there were various broadcasts to the nation, including from King George 6th. In finishing his speech he encouraged the nation to look forward in hope and confidence and ended with these words talking about the need to honour the memory of those who lost their lives and to work for all that is good in the world.

He said, "This is the task (*working for all that is good in the world*) to which now honour binds us. In the hour of danger we humbly committed our cause into the Hand of God, and He has been our Strength and Shield. Let us thank him for His mercies, and in this hour of Victory commit ourselves and our new task to the guidance of that same strong Hand".

May that same hand of God guide his church our nation and each one of us as we face the challenges before us in this time of the Covid pandemic. May we have in front of us the challenge that we are to shine the light of Jesus our Risen Lord wherever we are, and with whom we may meet. May that light shine in the darkness of this present time and may the darkness never overcome it.

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