

10th May 2020
75th Anniversary of VE Day

Welcome.

Dear friends, welcome to you as we come together on this day, we commemorate the 75th anniversary of Victory in Europe, when the sounds of war fell silent on this continent. We come together conscious of our need for God's forgiveness for the sin and the desire to dominate others that leads to conflict between people, and war between nations.

And as we remember the many soldiers, sailors, and airmen who gave their lives restraining evil and opposing tyranny, so we also come in thanksgiving for the years of peace that the nations of Europe have enjoyed since the Second World War. We gather joyfully today, as those who gathered on that first Victory day, glad of each other's company, and grateful for the laughter and love that follows times of sadness and loss. But above all things, let us pray that God's will may be done on earth as it is in heaven, as we join our voices together and say:

**Our Father, who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name;
thy kingdom come;
thy will be done;
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those who trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation;
but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom,
the power and the glory,
for ever and ever. Amen.**

Bible reading

Jesus said, 'Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house there are many dwelling-places. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, so that where I am, there you may be also. And you know the way to the place where I am going.' Thomas said to him, 'Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?' Jesus said to him, 'I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you know me, you will know my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him.'

Philip said to him, 'Lord, show us the Father, and we will be satisfied.' Jesus said to him, 'Have I been with you all this time, Philip, and you still do not know me? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, "Show us the Father"? Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own; but the Father who dwells in me does his works. Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; but if you do not, then believe me because of the works themselves. Very truly, I tell you, the one who believes in me will also do the works that I do and, in fact, will do greater works than these, because I am going to the Father. I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If in my name you ask me for anything, I will do it.'

Reflection

Today we commemorate the 75th anniversary of VE Day. For many it must have been a day of mixed emotions. The return of peace to Europe was arriving, and soon many who had been sent on active service would be able to return to their homes and families. Danger and threat were passing, and I can't begin to imagine the joy that was felt around our country on that day. And yet victory over the Japanese was still some months away, and the Red Army was now sitting in the middle of Europe and bringing great suffering to the civilian population of Germany, and uncertainty to the other Allies.

Not only this, but for many people, not least the women of our country, the end of the war would seem to mean returning to the home and the pre-war expectations of society, from which many would have found liberation during the war.

Fathers, like my own grandfather, would have been returning to children who may not even recognise them, uncertain of how they would be received. My own father was born in September 1939, with my grandfather joining the Royal Navy soon after, and coming home again in 1945. The arrival of peace, like the arrival of war, is not without its traumas.

Although it is the 'Victory in Europe' that we commemorate at this time, it is not victory that we celebrate. In war, no one truly wins. Is it not more a case of the side which loses the least? As Christians we can not celebrate war, but we can wholeheartedly express our gratitude for sacrifices made by others, and for the peace that was bought with their lives. And today we also celebrate the peace we have enjoyed with our neighbours for so many years, and for the cooperation that has grown over the past three quarters of a century, which we imperil at great risk.

For so many, the end of war meant the possibility of coming home, if not immediately, then at least safely. And it is the theme of homecoming that we hear about in John's gospel. A home that is prepared for us, a home that is permanent, a home that, in the economy of God's salvation, is where we can place our heart. There is a sense in which our earthly home is not simply some pale imitation of our future hope, but a joyful anticipation of what is to come, modelled on the vision of our heavenly home, and brought into our present reality.

In this chapter of John's gospel, the author goes on to report Jesus as saying this: "Peace I leave you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid". When we commit ourselves to the work of peace, in gratitude to those who gave their all in the service of others, we move in the direction of heaven, and answer the divine call to come home.

Meditation

A time of crisis and concern. The way ahead is obscured and the straight path we expected suddenly twists, away from still waters and green pastures, into a dark valley. The comforting landscape is gone and we stumble among the rocks. No longer seeing our destination, or what lies on the road that we tread.

Global conflicts, global pandemics unroot us from our old stories and threaten to leave us drifting, unsure of who we are; of what our story is today, and what it will be tomorrow. We make our stories, and our stories make us.

As we listen to memories of 75 years ago, let us pray for God's strength today, give thanks for all our blessings, and pray for healing and justice throughout the world.

I fear no evil; for you are with me; your rod and your staff—they comfort me.

An Act of Commitment

In an act of commitment, let us pledge ourselves anew to the service of God and our fellow men and women: that we may help, encourage and comfort others, and support those working for the relief of the needy and for the peace and welfare of the nations.

All **Lord God our Father,
we pledge ourselves to serve you and all humankind,
in the cause of peace,
for the relief of want and suffering,
and for the praise of your name.
Guide us by your Spirit;
give us wisdom;
give us courage;
give us hope;
and keep us faithful now and always.
Amen.**

Let us pray:
Almighty God,
from whom all thoughts of truth and peace proceed:
kindle in the hearts of all people the true love of peace;
and guide with your pure and peaceable wisdom
those who take counsel for the nations of the earth;
that in tranquillity your kingdom may go forward,
till the earth is filled with the knowledge of thy love;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.
All Amen.

The Blessing

God grant to the living, grace; to the departed, rest;
to the Church, the Queen, the Commonwealth,
and all people, peace and concord;
and to us and all his servants, life everlasting;
and the blessing of God almighty,
Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,
come down upon you
and remain with you always.
All Amen.