

# "NOTHING WILL SEPARATE US FROM THE LOVE OF CHRIST"

VE DAY SERVICE, WESTMINSTER ABBEY  
ISAIAH 56:6-9A,11-12; PSALM 107:1-16; ROMANS 8:31-39

On the 26 May 1940, with the Government here in this very Abbey, like those in the Psalm, across the country we cried to God in our trouble. Churchill wrote of the campaign in May-June 1940:

"Now at last the slowly-gathered, long pent-up fury of the storm broke upon us. Four or five millions of men met each other in the first shock of the most merciless of all the wars of which record has been kept. ... Within six weeks we were to find ourselves alone, almost disarmed... with the whole of Europe open to Hitler's power..."

And he went on to speak of the situation in 1945:

"The contrast was certainly remarkable. The road across these five years was long, hard and perilous. Those who perished upon it did not give their lives in vain. Those who marched forward to the end will always be proud to have trodden it with honour:"<sup>1</sup>

And now we gather again, 70 years on, thankful for victory over the greatest darkness of the twentieth century, perhaps of all history. Our gratitude is not simply for victory-in-Europe, but also reconciliation-in-Europe that followed, neither obviously nor automatically. Peace is more than the end of war: reconciliation dismantles the hostilities which previously separated and alienated us from one another and from God.

In November 1940 Coventry was terribly bombed. The fires lit the skies for miles, so many people died or were wounded, and amongst much else, the Cathedral burned. Yet from the next day the Provost of Coventry, the Very Reverend Richard Howard, set a course towards reconciliation and the dismantling of hostility. On Christmas Day 1940, on the BBC he preached, saying, "we want to tell the world... that with Christ born again in our hearts today, we are trying, hard as it may be, to banish all thoughts of revenge... We are going to try to make a kinder, simpler - a more Christ-child-like sort of world in the days beyond this strife."<sup>2</sup>

The peace for which we give thanks today - 70 years of the greatest peace in Western Europe since the departure of the Roman legions – remains an ongoing project of reconciliation in that world of

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<sup>1</sup> Winston Churchill, *The Second World War*, Cassell 1949, Volume II, pages 3-4.

<sup>2</sup> Very Reverend Richard Howard, Provost of Coventry, Christmas Day Sermon on the BBC 1940.

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which he spoke, not only for us but as a gift to the world, where conflict and extremism destroy hope, devastate prosperity, vanquish aspiration to a better life.

Isaiah speaks of how we meet that challenge to build a more Christchild like world of peace and hope. He gives a great and inspiring call to all of us who have received much to be those who give much. He calls us by sacrifice and determination to be those who raise up the foundations of many generations, who repair the breach and restore paths of peace and justice so that, as he says, "our light shall spring up like the dawn and our healing shall spring up quickly"<sup>3</sup>.

Paul, in words of fire and hope, reveals the foundations of our call to transform a world of war; to share the deliverance that we have received. Yes, there will be struggle and sacrifice, they have been there before and how gratefully we remember today those who gave everything in those years. But in the struggle against the darkness of cruelty and conflict, in the struggle for reconciliation, nothing can separate us from the love of Jesus Christ. Firmly held by his love we will overcome all fear, prevail over all discouragement, live our vocation to be still a nation of inspiration and generosity, of reconciliation, of blessing to our world.

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<sup>3</sup> Isaiah 58:8