

Fifth Sunday of Easter and VE Day Commemoration

The Collect: Risen Christ, your wounds declare your love for the world and the wonder of your risen life: give us compassion and courage in our service of others, to the glory of God the Father. Amen.

Isaiah 55.1-3,6-9: ¹Ho, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and you that have no money, come buy and eat! Come buy wine and milk without money and without price. ²Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labour for that which does not satisfy? Listen carefully to me, and eat what is good, and delight yourselves in rich food. ³Incline your ear, and come to me; listen, so that you may live. I will make with you an everlasting covenant my steadfast sure love for David. ⁶Seek the Lord while he may be found, call upon him while he is near; ⁷let the wicked forsake their way, and the unrighteous their thoughts; let them return to the Lord, that he may have mercy on them, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon. ⁸For my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways, says the Lord. ⁹For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.

John 14.1-14: ¹ 'Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me. ² 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? ³ 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. ⁴ And you know the way to the place where I am going.' ⁵ Thomas said to him, 'Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?' ⁶ Jesus said to him, 'I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. ⁷ If you know me, you will know my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him.' ⁸ Philip said to him, 'Lord, show us the Father, and we will be satisfied.' ⁹ 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"? ¹⁰ 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. ¹¹ 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. ¹² 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.

Reflection: With the announcement of the end of the War in Europe by Winston Churchill many gathered on 8th May 1945 in large groups to celebrate with others. People had lived for nearly six years on the home front and had experienced at times closed schools, disruption to food supplies and in many communities huge loss of life. Those at the front line had felt the full intensity of war and many worked behind the scenes to support them and to help them bring about the end of the war.

Some have understandably used the language of war in this battle against the Covid virus,

even though ours is a different battle. But the emotions we are feeling because of sudden and unexpected loss of life and living with lock down I think help give a connection to some of the emotions experienced during that war which ended in Europe 75 years ago last Friday. And just as we are doing each Thursday evening when we pause to celebrate those who are on the frontline fighting this virus, which includes those who have lost their lives, so it is important that today we do pause so that we can celebrate those who ensured the freedoms we have had and the widespread peace across much of Europe since May 1945.

Some veterans of that war live in our communities as do some who served in the years immediately after the war. There are also those in our communities whose childhood included the war years and it is important that their memories and thoughts of that time continue to be listened to and recorded.

What else was going on in May 75 years ago? Rationing, the return of dad often after years of absence, people living with the mental and physical effects of the frontline and the home front. These effects not always acknowledged or understood at the time, including the fear and uncertainty of children and adults whose lives had been changed forever by the war years. The advice to take each day as it comes and accept what each may bring is good advice but easier for some to be able to take on board than for others. Not easy for those in poverty or in poor mental health or for those living in controlling or abusive situations. There is more help available today than 75 years ago but not necessarily accessible to all. Part of that help is delivered through the National Health Service, something that did not exist in 1945 but which since and now we cherish and value and must ensure is always properly resourced.

Faith can also have a part to play. Not the fearful, judgemental, apocalyptic stuff that is all too easy to find on the internet and which could have been part of our own experience. Instead faith that is in the human capacity to be the best we can be and to selflessly serve others. Faith in the integrity and beauty of the created world. Faith at the heart of the Easter message that God reaches out in love to all and encourages us to see each day as a new day when things can be made new.

Just like in May 1945 when people did not forget so we will not forget how we are changed. Many will need a long time to come to terms with and to accept the changes the virus has brought. And we will remember those who died, including the sacrifice of lives given in service of others in health and public services.

People from many areas of life will now need to come together and to plan wisely for a future that will not be just going back to the normal of how we were. When World War Two began the effects of recession had played a part in the rise of the dictators. It also meant that many were only just getting by and the social and health care many needed was not in place. The years after the war saw the needs of these people at the centre of things and the start of the NHS in 1948 a real sign of a fairer and more compassionate society. We today also need a tangible sign of hope for transforming our communities in the years ahead.