

It is regularly said that we are at war with Coronavirus. So I am sure that I will not be the only leader of worship this weekend who will use the comparison of our present situation and the Second World War whose ending we are celebrating to such an extent that we even changed the date of the Bank Holiday. Except, of course, it is now a very muted celebration because any church services, street parties, or even just families gathering for a barbecue will not be happening.

But the more I have thought about this the more I have realised that that might be very appropriate. When I was minister at Earlsdon we held a special celebration service for VE Day and I interviewed people for their memories. I don't remember much about those memories of celebration except for one or two saying that they danced in Broadgate. But one man's explanation of why they didn't celebrate in his family is still vivid. "We celebrated a little bit. Had a special tea, I think. But I had a brother and a cousin still fighting in the Far East. We couldn't rejoice while we were still so worried about them. The war didn't actually finish on May 8th with Victory in Europe. It finished on August 15th but we never mark VJ Day".

Speaking as someone who has served on what they are calling 'the front line' of our present battle, I can assure you that the war is not over in our care and nursing homes. In normal circumstances, we would probably have been decorating the lounges with Union Flag bunting, inviting families to a street party tea and listening to some Vera Lynn songs. I think even if we could have families come in this weekend, we wouldn't have felt much like celebrating because we would have been too aware of those who are still ill and those families who are grieving. I have often said in these past weeks that this must have been like it was at the end of the war when groups came together, looked at the empty places and knew that this person and that person would never be sitting there again. Perhaps those of us who are too young to remember the actual VE Day haven't fully appreciated that any celebrations must have been muted with sadness and just sheer exhaustion.

We are still in the season of Easter in the church year, still celebrating that death and evil have been conquered by Jesus. But you would have to be totally blind, stupid or insensitive to think that makes everything all right. There is still too much suffering and pain, still too much sin and cruelty for us to think that everything is fine with the world. So does that mean that we are just being naïve in claiming that Jesus has conquered death and sin? No. But it does mean that we are living in what theologians call 'the already and the not yet' – his death on Calvary was the decisive battle between God and evil and death. His resurrection shows that God won. But the suffering is not yet over and won't be over until the end of time (whether that is our personal death or the end of the world).

The simplest way of communicating this paradox actually comes from the Second World War. The decisive battle was June 6th 1944, D Day. Once the Allies had invaded the mainland continent, the war had been won. There was no way that the Nazis would win after that. But just think how many more battles there were, how many people would die or be injured before Victory in Europe was actually secured. In the same way, Calvary was the decisive battle. After that there is no way that death and evil will win. But until the End of Time (however that comes) the power of death and sin will still bring suffering and pain. We will not be able to celebrate fully until we are in heaven.

Until then there will still be suffering but there will also be signs of the resurrection. One lady in Abbey Park was at death's door but she wanted to come back to us so that we could nurse her to the end. "We are all totally at peace with this", said her family to me. We are still not allowing visitors and so it was only the staff who were there yesterday to witness her first trip from her room to have tea in the lounge. We clapped and cheered her down the corridor, a small sign of resurrection hope that did us all good.

Jesus has won the battle against sin and death. The victory is secured. But we might have to wait a bit longer to celebrate unreservedly.

And on a very practical note. I do wonder whether this weekend's celebrations will be able to be done properly on August 15th. Victory in Japan Day. And, at last, we will mark the true end of the War.

Bible Reading: Romans 8:18-39

A prayer for VE Day

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.

A prayer for Christian Aid Week

Love never fails

Even in the darkest moments, love gives hope
Love compels us to fight against coronavirus alongside our sisters and brothers living in poverty.
Love compels us to stand together in prayer with our neighbours near and far.
Love compels us to give and act as one
Now, it is clear that our futures are bound together more tightly than ever before. As
we pray in our individual homes – around the nation and around the world – we are united as one family.

So, let us pause and find a moment of peace, as we lift up our hearts together in prayer.

And please don't forget that this is Christian Aid Week. The only way that they will be able to fund-raise this year will be on-line. Don't forget to donate.

A prayer for Methodist Homes for the Aged

God of mercy
At this time of anxiety and fear
We thank you for the dedicated work of MHA.
We pray your blessing on all who wash feet,
Who bring healing,
Who sit with the dying
Who bring comfort in confusion
Who bring peace to the afraid
In this we see the love of Jesus,
our strength and hope
and in whose name we pray Amen

(The Revd Barbara Glasson, President of the Methodist Conference)