

## Sermon – 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of VE Day – 8<sup>th</sup> May 2020

I wonder what attitude, what emotions it is that we bring to the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of VE Day. It's perhaps something we've had to think about more this year than we might have in other circumstances. As with so much this year, the original plans have been curtailed, and we have therefore had to think carefully about appropriate ways to mark the event. It may even be that the many planned front garden picnics say as much about our current situation as they do about what we are commemorating.

As you know, VE Day marked the end of the Second World War on the Western Front, and to that extent was a cause for celebration. Soldiers would return home. It was a sign that the devastating loss of life would come to an end.

But of course the war was not to end for another 4 months. Soldiers continued to fight and to die in Japan. And while there would be a homecoming for some, the scale of loss of life in the Second World War meant that no-one remained untouched. The liberation of the concentration camps in Germany and Poland opened people's eyes to the scale of the atrocities that had taken place. Lives would never be the same again.

So what attitudes and emotions do we bring to this important commemoration?

Perhaps the first thing to acknowledge is the importance of remembering. Of remembering the sacrifices that were made. Of honouring those who lost their lives as well as those who risked their lives.

The two Bible readings chosen for today point us in important directions. The first, from the Old Testament prophet Micah, offers a vision of peaceful living as children of God. Perhaps the commemoration of VE Day brings a new commitment to peace. I love that image of beating swords into ploughshares and spears into pruning hooks. The weapons of destruction become instruments with which we ensure we are all fed.

And the New Testament reading, part of the story of the Prodigal Son, reminds us of the importance of forgiveness. The joy of return is facilitated by the gracious forgiveness of the father. While celebration is only a part of our commemoration of VE Day, it is no less important for that. And perhaps the choice of the story of the Prodigal Son also reminds us that we continue to commemorate in order to ensure that we continue to learn. The elder brother refuses to be part of the celebrations and remains stuck. The younger brother comes to understand the true nature of forgiveness.

There are two phrases that are frequently used by Jesus throughout the gospels. Do not be afraid. And Peace be with you. I wonder whether these are what connects the gospel with VE Day. We remember the courage of those who fought – and those who continue to serve in our armed forces. There is a need for those who are not afraid in the face of danger. For those who stand up for what is right.

And we also need to live in the hope of peace. The peace that in the end only God can bring into our hearts. A peace that passes all understanding. The peace that comes from knowing that we are all beloved children of the same heavenly father. Amen