

## **A Sermon for VE Day – Salisbury Cathedral**

Isaiah 40: 27-31 & Romans 8:31-39

Victory in Europe Day – the 8<sup>th</sup> May 1945, came at the end of a war in Europe that was to change the lives of every nation. The scale of the costs was huge, in terms of human lives lost in the air, on land and at sea; in the civilian lives lost in bombing raids; and the inevitable financial damages in the economy, employment, resources for housing and feeding the nation.

Everyone's war was personal and far-reaching. Therefore, VE Day 1945, though happy, was tinged with great sadness for many, and uncertainty about the future for everyone. Celebrations broke out to mark VE Day. Prime Minister Winston Churchill declared May 8<sup>th</sup> a public holiday, and in his speech proclaimed:

"God bless you all. This is your victory! It is the victory of the cause of freedom in every land. In all our long history we have never seen a greater day than this. Everyone, man or woman, has done their best. Everyone has tried. Neither the long years, nor the dangers, nor the fierce attacks of the enemy, have in any way weakened the independent resolve of the British nation. God bless you all..."

Despite rationing, people all over the country found a way to party. Households provided what they could for the communal tables in street parties, church bells rang out, and it was a festive nation that came together for VE Day. And lessons had to be learned, and made part of who we wanted to be, as a nation. One of the great steps into a better future happened in July 1948, with the creation of our wonderful National Health Service. Three values drove this vision – a health service for everyone; free at the point of service; and based on your needs, not what you could afford. Thank God for that lesson learned; thank God for our NHS.

And now we meet again, albeit rather more strangely, 75 years on, thankful for victory over the greatest darkness of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Our gratitude is not simply for victory-in-Europe, but also for reconciliation-in-Europe that followed. Peace is more than the end of war: reconciliation dismantles the cause and the actions which previously separated and alienated us from one another and from God.

I was struck by the online sermon by our Dean Nicholas, at the 800<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the laying of the foundation stones of the new Cathedral here in Salisbury. The Dean cited the falling out between the clergy and the military at Old Sarum, with the soldiers making it difficult for services to be held as the Cathedral was in the grounds of the Old Sarum Garrison, and even charging the Cathedral for water, from the only well, within the castle. Bad behaviours indeed. And the clergy decided enough was enough, and the move to a new cathedral was put in place.

I've been an army chaplain for 18 years, serving in a number of roles, but primarily as the Senior Chaplain to Wiltshire Army Cadets. I'm relieved to tell you that the relations between our modern military and the new Cathedral are very good. The Cathedral is the Garrison Church of the Army Air Corps, and hosts many commemorations including homecomings, when Regiments return from deployments overseas. Our behaviours have improved.

I'm so proud of the current deployment of our armed forces, who have built seven Nightingale field hospitals, who have distributed millions of items of protective clothing and other essential items to our NHS, and are supporting the staffing of the drive through testing centres.

Isaiah speaks of how we meet that challenge to work towards a world of peace and hope. To put our trust and faith in the God of power who gives us strength and courage. He gives a great and inspiring call to all of us who have received much, to become those who give much.

He calls us by sacrifice and determination to be those who repair the breach and restore paths of peace and justice so that, as he says, "those who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk, and not faint."

St 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. On this 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of VE Day, the great plans we had to celebrate our triumph at so great a cost, have been curtailed through another National Crisis. We cannot have street parties, we cannot ring our church bells, we cannot gather with friends and families to hug and kiss. Not yet.

Yes, once again in the history of our great nation, there will be struggle and sacrifice, we have been there before, and with gratitude, 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, we will prevail over all discouragement, we will live our vocation to be a nation of inspiration and generosity, of reconciliation, that we will be a people of blessing to our world.

Indeed, God bless you all.