

Service of the Word 16 August 2020

Pentecost 11 - VJ Day Anniversary

Welcome

Good Morning and welcome to our Service. Yesterday across the world people gathered, mostly virtually, but some in a very moving ceremony at the National Memorial Arboretum to remember the 75th Anniversary of VJ Day. This is the day that the second world war ended and it follows closely on the marking of the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki two weeks ago which finally brought the war to a close. It has a very different feel to Victory in Europe Day which was marked with celebrations just a few months ago. This anniversary, because of the use of atomic bombs and the horrific suffering of so many in prisoner of war camps - this anniversary is more somber, more thoughtful. It seems to fit better the present mood of so much of the world. There are celebrations but mostly small personal ones. There is thanksgiving muted more by a sense of relief rather than victory. So we gather today to share our voices present and virtual in remembrance, thanksgiving and praise.

Gathering

We are gathered together as the family of God
to offer praise and thanksgivings
to ask forgiveness of our sins
to hear and receive God's holy Word
to pray for the needs of the world
and to seek God's grace
that through Jesus Christ our Lord
and in the power of the Holy Spirit
we may give ourselves to God's service.

Penitence

You raise the dead to life in the Spirit.
Lord, have mercy.

You bring pardon and peace to the broken in heart.
Christ, have mercy.

You make one by your Spirit the torn and divided.
Lord, have mercy.

O Lord, all we long for is before you;

and our deep sighing is not hidden from you.
But we acknowledge our wickedness;
we are filled with sorrow at our sin.
Be pleased O Lord, to deliver us;
O Lord, make haste to help us.
May the Lord forgive what we have been,
help us to amend what we are
and direct what we shall be,
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Praise

Glory to God in the highest,
and peace to God's people on earth.
Lord God, heavenly King,
almighty God and Father,
with God the Son, Jesus Christ,
and God the Holy Spirit,
we worship you, we give you thanks,
we praise you for your glory.
Lord Jesus Christ, only Son of the Father,
Lord God, Lamb of God,
you take away the sin of the world;
have mercy on us;
you are seated at the right hand of the Father: receive our prayer.
For you alone are the Holy One,
you alone are the Lord,
you alone are the Most High,
Jesus Christ, with the Holy Spirit,
in the glory of God the Father. Amen.

Collect of the Day *for peace*

Almighty God,
from whom all thoughts of truth and peace proceed:
kindle in the hearts of all people the true love of peace;
and guide with your pure and peaceable wisdom
those who take counsel for the nations of the earth;
that in tranquillity your kingdom may go forward,
till the earth is filled with the knowledge of thy love;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.

First Reading

Psalm 133

1-3 How wonderful, how beautiful,
when brothers and sisters get along!
It's like costly anointing oil
flowing down head and beard,
Flowing down Aaron's beard,
flowing down the collar of his priestly robes.
It's like the dew on Mount Hermon
flowing down the slopes of Zion.
Yes, that's where God commands the blessing,
ordains eternal life.

Psalm 134

1-3 Come, bless God,
all you servants of God!
You priests of God, posted to the nightwatch
in God's shrine,
Lift your praising hands to the Holy Place,
and bless God.
In turn, may God of Zion bless you—
God who made heaven and earth!

Second Reading Luke 15.17-20

17-20 "That brought him to his senses. He said, 'All those farmhands working for my father sit down to three meals a day, and here I am starving to death. I'm going back to my father. I'll say to him, Father, I've sinned against God, I've sinned before you; I don't deserve to be called your son. Take me on as a hired hand.' He got right up and went home to his father.

20-21 "When he was still a long way off, his father saw him. His heart pounding, he ran out, embraced him, and kissed him. The son started his speech: 'Father, I've sinned against God, I've sinned before you; I don't deserve to be called your son ever again.'

22-24 "But the father wasn't listening. He was calling to the servants, 'Quick. Bring a clean set of clothes and dress him. Put the family ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Then get a grain-fed heifer and roast it. We're going to feast! We're going to have a wonderful time! My son is here—given up for dead and now alive! Given up for lost and now found!' And they began to have a wonderful time.

Reflection

There is a strong sense of *unfinished business* which surrounds the marking of the 75th anniversary of VJ Day. Lacking an atmosphere of *celebration* even calling it *Victory* in Japan Day feels somehow inappropriate because for many although it felt like the end of a conflict, an end to war, it did not feel much like a victory. Like most of you I am not old enough to remember the Second World War. My father served in the Pacific with the US Army but he never, ever talked about his experiences during the war. I do recall the distant look of pain which would come into his eyes when the War in the Pacific was talked about in the news or documentaries. It was only after his death that we found among some family papers a Meritorious Certificate of Commendation which he received for helping to rescue the crew of a Superfortress airplane which crashed into the sea off the island of Saipan where he was stationed as a radio officer.

The war in the Far East is a war of *unfinished business*, as are all of the conflicts still ongoing across the world today. There is much *unfinished business* to be remember on VJ day which effects people across the world today:

- physical, mental and spiritual pain
- damaged lives; still paying the cost
- unhealed wounds of countless human spirits
- wounded memories of many more

Because the damage was not just in conventional conflict but in the prisoner of war camps, forced labour and the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. We could talk of reconciliation and of forgiveness as we often do on VE Day but that may be the wrong starting point. Today we still need to speak of *unfinished business because there are still stories to be told.*

Because so many veterans of the War in the Pacific, like my father, either did not speak about their experiences or took a long time to tell their stories we have to begin with remembering. The memories of those who served there are known at one level through films, like Bridge of the River Kawi or Pearl Harbour or TV series like Tenko. The big anniversaries have each time brought more stories to light; moving and difficult revelations from men and women who experienced first hand the horrors of the War in the Far East. People like Captain Sir Tom Moore the amazing man who raised millions for NHS charities. His efforts in the sponsored walk reflects the grit and determination of many who survived this sometimes forgotten area of conflict in the Far East.

While there is remembering at some level, there is still a strong sense of pain, suffering which is *unacknowledged* for many even today. The Pacific is distant in space, half a world away from Europe; distant in time, 75 years and distant in understanding of the experience for those of us who were not there. I did not learn, even the little bit I know, about my father's experience until VJ day had been marked for over 50 years.

Remembering, open and honest willingness to share stories begins the process of healing which leads to reconciliation and forgiveness. Naming wounds, especially the hidden ones that damage us most is a good beginning. This plea for honest sharing of stories both individual and institutional is what fuels the current Black Lives Matter movement. There is much unfinished business here too.

The cost of forgiveness is high as our Gospel reading this morning tells us. We heard the ending of this familiar story of the Prodigal Son or more correctly the Forgiving Father. It tells us that forgiveness does not include forgetting our memories. On the contrary it is about remembering honestly; including the mistakes and wrongdoing. The cost of forgiveness is about letting go of the bitterness and resentment which we often hold onto so dearly.

The picture of forgiveness, God's forgiveness, is the forgiving Father opening wide his arms and welcoming home his beloved son regardless of what he has done.

Sometimes accepting from God the gift of being able to forgive may be the only way to *finish the unfinished business*. The cost of forgiveness is high but the reward is higher. Forgiveness gives us back our memories. We no longer need to shut them out, to try usually unsuccessfully to forget. We are given them back and are able to remember without the pain that disables us.

If memories of the War in the Pacific are particularly on our minds this weekend it reminds us that we all have *unfinished business of one sort or another* in our lives. We all carry bitterness and resentment over experience of events, people who have hurt and damaged us. It is the restlessness of this *unfinished business* which draws us toward God, seeking reconciliation, forgiveness and healing. St Paul, if I may take the liberty of paraphrasing him, sums it up neatly when he says:

Nothing in the heights or depths of our experience can separate us from the love of God found in Jesus Christ.

*The Unforgiving Father reminds us that no amount of unfinished business in our lives is great enough to separate us from the love of God. The answer to unfinished business; to damaged lives; to wounded memories; to suffering spirits is **hope, hope in the love of God to reach out to us in Christ and draw us to forgiveness and healing.***

Apostle's Creed

I believe in God, the Father almighty,
creator of heaven and earth.

I believe in Jesus Christ, God's only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit, and born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried; he descended to the dead.

On the third day he rose again;
he ascended into heaven,
he is seated at the right hand of the Father,
and he will come to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy catholic Church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and the life everlasting. Amen.

Let us pray, for the church and the world, thanking God for the blessings in our lives

Intercessions

Blessing

Our Father,
who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name;
thy kingdom come;
thy will be done;
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom,
the power and the glory,
Forever and ever. Amen

Act of Dedication

Almighty God,
we thank you for the gift of your holy word:
may it be a lantern to our feet,
a light upon our paths,
and a strength to our lives.
Take us and use us to love and serve all people
in the power of the Holy Spirit
and in the name of your Son,
Jesus Christ our Lord.

Praise

You send forth your Spirit, O Lord; *
you renew the face of the earth.

You send forth your Spirit, O Lord; *
you renew the face of the earth.

May the glory of the Lord endure for ever; may the Lord rejoice in all his works.

You renew the face of the earth.

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit.

You send forth your Spirit, O Lord; * you renew the face of the earth.

Blessing

The peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in the knowledge and love of God, and of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord: And the blessing of God almighty, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, Be with you and all those for whom you have a care this day and evermore. Amen