

## 75TH ANNIVERSARY OF VE DAY

Next Friday is the 75th anniversary of VE Day. The 8th May 1945 marked the end of the 2nd World War in Europe as the Allies accepted the unconditional surrender of Nazi Germany. The war continued in the Far East for another 3 months until VJ Day on 15th August.

Sadly, many of the celebrations for the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of VE Day have had to be cancelled or deferred because of the present coronavirus pandemic. Celebrations such as the march down the Mall, the ringing of church bells, street and community parties. And what about the 20,000 pubs that were eagerly encouraging people to raise a toast to the heroes of the war – not to mention all those dancers who have been practising the Lindy hop!

In preparation for the 75th anniversary I asked Mike Fletcher to research the stories behind the 10 Commonwealth war graves to be found in St Peter's graveyard. It is a really important piece of work as we learn about those who made the ultimate sacrifice and whose final resting place is here. Like Sergeant John Alfred Entwistle - Wireless Operator & Rear Gunner of the RAF. At his funeral Revd. Harold Barsley also added that John was a Chorister and Server at St Peter's. On this anniversary of VE Day we remember ordinary people who did extraordinary things. Mike's booklet is available on our [website](#).

Speaking on the balcony of Buckingham Palace on VE Day, Winston Churchill declared "The lights went out and the bombs came down. But every man, woman and child in the country had no thought of quitting the struggle...so we came back after long months from the jaws of death and out of the mouth of hell", acknowledging that "the road across those 5 years were long and hard."

For many on the front line fighting coronavirus today, the "jaws of death and the mouth of hell" are suitable descriptions of what they face, and we hope and pray that our present Prime Minister will be able to say something similar when we finally emerge from today's pandemic.

In this month's parish magazine you can read the reflections and hopes for the future of some parishioners who wrote to mark the 50th anniversary of VE Day in 1995. Bill Hawkins, who was at one time a Churchwarden of St Peter's, wrote about how he had got married in 1941 and it was on VE Day four years later he and his wife, Myfanwy, could begin to look forward to a more normal life. He spoke of his high hopes for the future, though he added, "we all know that life was going to be different."

A similar sentiment was expressed by the Dean of Coventry Cathedral which had been obliterated by a bomb in November 1940. In a Christmas broadcast just one month later he said that instead of harbouring thoughts of revenge, people should "try to make a kinder, simpler, more Christ-childlike sort of world in the days beyond the strife."

And what better sentiments and hopes should we have as we emerge from what Churchill described as "the jaws of death and the mouth of hell."

Will our experience of Covid-19 spur us on to make "a kinder, simpler, more Christ-child

like sort of world? Will we keep before us what we have come to value and prioritise during restrictions and lockdown? Let's hope we will remember.

In the church's calendar, the 8th May is the day we commemorate Julian of Norwich, the English mystic and spiritual writer who lived around the turn of the 15th century.

The Middle Ages were cruel and dangerous times for ordinary people too, with both wars and life-threatening epidemics to be endured. What Julian of Norwich wrote to the struggling people of her day apply equally to us 600 years later.

She wrote "Christ did not say you shall not be troubled, you shall not be travailed, you shall not be diseased. But (rather) he said, 'You shall not be overcome.'

She sought to share the profound assurance that whatever life's circumstances, whatever troubles or difficulties or pain; whatever hardships and sufferings nevertheless God's nature and God's name is Love.

And this is borne out in today's Gospel where we are given the picture of Jesus as the Good Shepherd, leading his flock through dangers and difficulties, constantly being a watchful presence with them until they are secure for the night in the safety of the sheepfold. He knows his sheep and his sheep know him – his care and consideration for them – for us - is personal and individual.

We are given another picture in the epistle from Acts – that of the early followers of Jesus cooperating together as a group, caring for one another, acting in solidarity with each other, working together for the good of all, "with glad and generous hearts."

I want us to hold on to those two pictures for they have much to encourage us as we face the challenges of the future.

On VE Day in 1945, Churchill told the crowds "We must begin the task of rebuilding our hearth and home....and turn ourselves to fulfil our duty to our countrymen and women."

A similar task that will face us in the days and months ahead as we begin to emerge out of the present pandemic. And we must not become complacent now in our care for others. For the edge of loneliness has become very sharp as these weeks pass – let us all continue to seek ways of showing God's love to others. Let us be ordinary people who did extraordinary things from our isolation. We all know that life is going to be different but may the sacrifice that so many have made make our world more Christ like.

The disciples learnt quickly that strength lay in mutual care and unity and also that they were upheld and strengthened for all they had to do by the shepherd-like presence and love of the risen Jesus. A presence and love offered to us all.

Amen.