

Sermon: John 14:1-14

VE Day 75 and Christian Aid Appeal are both staunch markers in the psyche of a nation of faiths or no faith – and of a world that longs for hope – for peace – for healing – for sharing and caring. Indeed, in its finest hour, the UK is indeed a Land of hope and glory.

We have had the bunting and the stay at home picnics. There have been songs that have evoked the atmosphere of the day – a day full of emotion and relief and today as we listen to them we too get a pull at the heart strings through music and words that touch the very being of what it is to be human when darkness and danger has been overcome by the light of hope – warmth – hope – love – friendship – and where a homeland of peace and truth and inner and outer freedom has never been more longed-for.

Indeed we have our own St Peter memories – our Whatsapp group shared photos and war records of dear family members who took part – and their own memories – Margaret shared the commemorative medal that her parents received – Sheila Covey shared about the joyous memory she has as a child of her parents and everyone being so happy – residents falling out into the streets clapping and cheering and laughing and crying...

VE Day – not condoning or honouring war – is about honouring heroism from men and women who did what they had to do in the best way they could with each having a part to play – and we are seeing this weekend stories of all that – and we are appropriately celebrating, commemorating, remembering, hoping...

And doesn't that sound familiar today about the predicament we find ourselves in – doubting – questioning – yet hoping beyond hope for a sign of something we can trust in – feel safe in – believe in....

And it was the same predicament that the disciples found themselves in back then when Jesus gave his last speech if you like after washing his disciple's feet – during that last supper just before he was arrested, tried and crucified.

They too were confused and bewildered by what they were hearing – but Jesus tried to reassure them that he would always be with them if they turned to him – prayed to him and through him – and followed him because then the spirit that was in him – the Father's Spirit – of love, hope and peace – would be in them too.

I wonder what they would have prayed to Jesus for back then – what would you pray to Jesus for right now?

As I say in the sermon for Christian Aid – for me, I wouldn't hesitate to say peace is what I would pray for – a peace that passes understanding – that can stand the test of scary – unjust – tragic times as well as the calm and happy times - This is the peace that stays with us – even when a Coronavirus pandemic is ravaging the world – communities - families – people – a peace that stays with us through unsettling times and seasons.

And this I believe is the peace that is bubbling under the surface of our communal spirits at the moment – waiting to happen – waiting to be experienced..

The peace that comes when we are not restless because we can't go shopping and spending – sometimes money we haven't got –

The peace that comes when we are so in the moment watching the birds make their nests – sing their tunes –

The peace that comes when we are slowing down – getting to know each other – learning to breathe cleaner, quieter air – and expecting it...

The peace that comes with trusting – that if we do our bit – and do it honestly and in the spirit of the common good – all will be well and will recover in time – and all the sacrifices made in this time of exile from a familiar world and the suffering that has heartbreakingly been a too familiar story will not have been in vain – but would have been honoured by those flying the flag for peace – for goodness – and for hope.

So how do we do that – stay honest and vulnerable about our longings – not getting lured into a world that created where we are in the first place in one way or another – and having the courage to face the darkness and know that the light shines the brightest in the darkest moments – and know that the light of love might change shape and be disguised – but it is nevertheless there – waiting to be revealed – redeemed – healed – restored...

Well we have heard in our Gospel reading today – Jesus has been quite clear in giving the answers – even doubting Thomas and Need-to-know-more Philip got it in the end –

He tells us: Believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house there are many dwelling-places. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And I – Jesus – am the way, the truth and the life – and no one comes to the Father except through me....

Know me – know the Father – who has many dwelling places for us –

And those places are not just the places waiting for us when we die – but places here and now – places prepared by Jesus as we allow him to enter our hearts and fill us with his spirit that can touch with our human spirit to bring forth that way of life we are longing for.

The way of peace – and truth – and abundant life is the deal – is actually one place – it is the heart of a restored and redeemed and healed humanity that breathes life into the dwelling places of our life stories whether we class ourselves as the rich – the poor – the refugee – the homeless – the oppressed – the marginalised – the forgotten and the lonely – it breathes the loving life of God into those places –

Through Jesus – the spirit of God touches everything when anything is done in his name.

And when we allow that spirit of love and goodness to flow freely from us we can no longer see a neighbour in desperate need – we have to reach out and help and do what we can – we can no longer see the locked doors and keep out signs of borders, class, race and gender....

I am the way, the truth and life – do it all in my name – and you too will be offering to others the way, the truth and the life. Just ask – whatever you do in my name I will do it...

And that's the kind of hope that Christian Aid can pray for this week – that the hearts and minds of today will be opened to the needs of the world's most vulnerable people – needs that were great enough before the coronavirus hit to make things worse and blessings of kindness will spill out from the family – into the local community – the wider community – and into the neighbours of the world – those who we will never know or never meet but who will always be united with us in the bond of peace and love – and generosity...

So how does this happen? Well, quite simply – we pray – we ask God to help us become willing to have a heart for goodness that knows no boundaries – and we ask Jesus to come to us and help us along the way....

The action of a non-Action Christian Aid week is prayer – and the outpouring of a heartfelt prayer in Jesus' name is love – and genuine love will find its way out into the world in a way that the world needs...

And a parting thought as we lead into a time to listen to our local St Peter's School Mums – known as the Songbirds to us locals – sing one of the most heartfelt songs of longing for hope and peace – keep the Home fires burning –

Perhaps – when we hear of Jesus comforting and calling his disciples, inviting them to follow him and come to him to be with God the Father of all through him – we might think on the words of the songs of the moment – that we need to keep the home fires burning – we need to keep hearts yearning – and though we all are far away from our loved ones we can dream of silver linings through dark clouds shining – until in the name of Jesus – sticking together through thick and thin to rebuild anew – heart by heart – community by community – we will meet again – and will be encouraged today as the disciples were back then by some of the most comforting words that Jesus has spoken; 'Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me – the way, and the truth and the lifewhatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son - I will do it. Amen