

THE SERMON

The Chaplain

On Sunday the 18th of June 1944, this chapel was full of people for the Sunday morning service. There were guardsmen, their families and friends, nurses from the nearby hospitals, local residents and visitors to London. They'd all gathered officially to commemorate the anniversary of the defeat of Napoleon at the battle of Waterloo in June 1815. But many had also come to give thanks for the success of the D-Day landings that had begun only 12 days before. The tide of war in Europe was turning. So the service was very much one of thanksgiving for victory in Belgium and for the Normandy landings that had begun the liberation of Europe. At 10 minutes past eleven, a V1 rocket hit this chapel at the northwest end, killing 123 people instantly, and many more to die from their injuries.

And as the dust and rubble cleared, the apse behind me here it remained intact; the cross and six still burning candles shining out, a reminder of those words from St. John's Gospel of the light that shines in darkness, and the darkness could not overcome it. And so every Sunday, we use those same candlesticks which held those candles to remind us that even in the darkest times, God's love is constant and his light shines before us. War is destructive, chaotic and represents political failure; it is a deeply regrettable last resort when everything else has been tried. And its destruction extends far beyond the battlefields, as the bombing of this chapel illustrates. Yet that symbolism of the candles burning in this chapel reminds us that in a world that is constantly changing, there's a deep desire to hold on to those values that rise above the destruction and harm that the world inflicts upon itself; a desire for a better way of living, anchored in ideals that are good, enduring and build up our common life.

St. Paul, writing to Timothy in our lesson today speaks of offering prayers for all in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life: Christ reminds us that working for the values of The Kingdom will be costly. That we'll have to take up our own cross, endure hardships, and if necessary show the greatest love of all, laying down our own life for the sake of others. Prayer and action go hand in hand. Christianity never underestimates the human pain and sufferings of war. The journey to that glorious Easter morning is only through the pain of Good Friday; our faith recognises the reality of a fallen world and that sometimes it is necessary to fight to protect the persecuted and to maintain those values which sustain and build up our world. Yet the Christian faith also teaches us that violence and sacrifice will never have the last word; for we are people of hope; of hope that something lies beyond this world with all its sin and suffering.

There is more, because God holds them in his life, an eternal hope of redemption and new life. So today we meet with many others at memorials throughout the country to remember: to remember all those who were prepared to take a stand against those forces and powers which threatened and continue to threaten the things we hold dear.

We remember those millions who for us are just names inscribed on war memorials, and we also remember those who are much closer to us. Family members or those we have served alongside on operations. And we also call to mind and pray for those who this very day will face danger on our behalf, protecting our values and working for peace. And how do we remember them? It must be more than just a memory of what they've done. For them to truly live on, we must be inspired by their example and their values to become our values, their vision for a just and peaceful world to become our vision, their love for others become our love for others. In this way their name will live on and the peace that they fought so hard to achieve we take forward and pass on to others yet to be born.

And this is why today we stand and remember those who have died in war: today we pray that their example may be an inspiration for us; that when confronted by those who seek the way of violence or oppression, or hate, we too may take a stand: because as long as ordinary people are willing to do extraordinary things in the cause of these enduring values of peace, then evil will never have the final say, and the values of God's kingdom will become the values of our kingdom.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

Amen.