

75 years on

Today we are 75 years on from the ending of a great crisis – of total war in Europe. Yet we cannot properly mark it because we are in the midst of another crisis – arguably the greatest challenge that the world has seen since the Second World War. Rightly in my view, we should still remember the sacrifice of those who served in the Navy, Army, Air Force, Merchant Navy and civilian services, even if we have to do so from our homes rather than in large ceremonies. Perhaps poignantly, being in our homes will remind us that some of the greatest tragedies of WW2 occurred not only in set-piece battles between armed personnel and machines, but on the home fronts of this and many other countries. There the grievous death toll included many civilians of all ages and nationalities. Liverpool, like many large towns and cities,



suffered grievously from heavy bombing, especially aimed at its maritime, transport and industrial infrastructure. Like other key targets, it was often those whose communities were close to the industry who paid the greatest price in terms of destroyed lives and homes. Yet the remarkable morale of the British civilian population held up and in many ways strengthened through this time of intense adversity; much to the bewilderment of Hitler it would appear.



The shadow of WW2 on this city struck me almost as soon as I set foot in Liverpool on my first visit here on study leave in 2015. My lift from Lime Street Station to Canning Street, where I had lodgings, took me past what my driver explained was 'the bombed-out church' – St. Luke's – a casualty of the bombing and left as a memorial to all those from the city who died in WW2. Now, he explained, and as I was to experience for myself, it was a cultural hub, buzzing for much of the year with life and the arts. I was deeply impressed.

That the Cathedral came away from the bombing relatively unscathed is perhaps something of a miracle. As several of the photographs kindly supplied by our Archives team show, there were several near misses. It looks as though one of the bombsites is pretty much where some of us Canons live now. It is sobering to recall that people died on this very spot. I suspect too, that the survival of the Cathedral, as for other major buildings in other cities and towns, was due to the bravery of individual fire-watchers standing on the roofs

during the bombing at great risk to themselves and promptly pushing away incendiary bombs before they could do their worst and fire get a hold. These remarkable, and often unsung heroes, certainly gain my admiration.

I know that there are those who feel that these 'remembrance' occasions may tend to glorify war. I disagree, and over the years, I have found that the veterans who are rightly front and centre of our commemorations are those who hate war most because they have witnessed the carnage that it causes first hand.





We do, however, need to learn from remembrance. We look back to recall and honour those who put their lives on the line for our freedom – many paying the ultimate price with their lives; we also look around now at our world and acknowledge where there are still wars and conflicts going on and making an effort to help those who continue to suffer at the hands of others; and we must look ahead and support those who are seeking to fashion a better world where war and oppression will be far less likely. That is the hardest road, in a way.

Even with common and universal threats such as Covid-19 and global warming, it has saddened me that it has not brought all nations together in a common endeavour to protect our planet and its people. Human

selfishness and political agendas unfortunately can contaminate and skew what should otherwise be opportunities for renewed unity. Perhaps that shouldn't entirely surprise me. When Jesus spoke of 'peace' he did not just mean an absence of hostilities but the Jewish understanding of peace as '*Shalom*'. *Shalom* is a hard word to translate, but it embraces a sense of well-being, good health (in the broadest sense) and an inner resting in Jahweh, the creator of the world. This God intends not just for individuals but for whole communities and nations too. Thus Jeremiah exhorts God's people to seek the welfare (literally the *Shalom*) of the city where the Jewish exiles had been sent (Jeremiah 29:7) and "to pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare."

75 years ago today, the hostilities with Nazi-Germany that had caused untold suffering across Europe and in this city came to an end. For that we should pause and give thanks, I suggest. You may wish, therefore, to follow the link to the Liverpool Cathedral pre-recorded service which has been put together for this day and is a free download from the "prayerforliverpool" website. There is also a link to a national initiative called 'Big Picnic for Hope' which quite a number of Cathedrals are supporting. It encourages people to have a picnic in their own homes – a reminder of the street parties that occurred on VE-Day and which would have been recreated all over the nation today, had conditions allowed it.



As we pause, may we also pledge ourselves afresh to the on-going work of bringing '*Shalom*' to our lives, households, communities, city and world. This will be an act of prayer and courageous action which will be an on-going challenge for all of us. Which is why this Cathedral's endeavour, day in day out (and even when we are closed as a building), is to enable people to encounter the God who knows and loves them. For it is in and through God's love that we find the source of that true peace which will ultimately bring the kind of transformation to make war only a thing of the past and not of the present nor future.

Canon Neal