

As we mark the 75th anniversary of Victory in Europe we acknowledge the huge act of reconciliation that took place. The reconciliation began in 1945 but continued, and continues, right up into our own time. From 1939 – 1945 Europe was, once more, broken apart. Country was set against country and war ravaged Europe for the 2nd time in 50 years. In this war some 50 – 56 million people (both military and civilian) were killed by acts of war and 19 – 28 million died from war-related disease and famine, worldwide.

Of course, VE Day only marked the end of hostilities in Europe. A vicious war in the Far East continued into August 1945. This country and its crown dependencies all over the world, stood together with allies from every part of the globe. Ultimately, the murderous Nazi state was defeated by a coalition of many countries. The old saying was never truer, “United we stand, divided we fall.” These words are first found in Aesop’s fables and Jesus speaks a version of them in Mark’s gospel. Between May and August 1945 this alliance would also suppress the Japanese regime and its forces. World peace was brought about, once more, by allies working together.

After the Second World War the Western and Eastern blocks, centred around the USA and the Soviet Union, emerged, balancing two groups of countries against each other. Yet Western Europe, that had catastrophically sucked the whole world into its disputes with such a deadly result, actually united after 1945. Old enemies became new friends and NATO and the European Common Market emerged. These were new symbols of the commitment to collective effort and cooperation.

The result was an unprecedented surge in prosperity in Europe, with the help of American money, to rebuild and flourish. Our Bible readings today offered a vision of a world where war would have no place and, also, of a son being reconciled to his father, a symbol of sinful humans returning to God in repentance. Jesus came not only to remind us of God’s desire for people to be united and reconciled, but also to open the way to reconciliation through his own sacrifice. This would lead to a better world and, in time, God would come and live with his people once more. Unity and reconciliation lead to prosperity, justice and peace for us all.

VE day was one of huge relief and jubilation for our population, thanking God for the end of terrible days, and also acknowledging the awful sacrifices made by so many for their countries. We acknowledged then, and we remember today, our own war dead and the mercy of God in delivering us from what looked like certain disaster at the beginning of the war. We also thank God, not only for those who fought on our behalf, but for those who supported them in that fight.

Looking back so many years later gives us a different perspective. We witness today, a world that is growing apart again, with countries retreating into political isolation. We have been drawing apart over the last few years despite a series of threats that can only be dealt with by the world holding together and being united.

I’m thinking of the challenges of a changing world climate, air pollution in our cities, the world becoming uninhabitable due to global heating and extreme climate events. It has taken the pandemic caused by Covid 19 to drive at least some countries back together. The virus presents the kind of de-stabilising and fragmenting threat that could shatter us apart as societies. It is heartening to see scientists around the world collaborating with each other to develop treatments. It is equally encouraging to see

many countries consulting with each other over the best ways to deal with this latest and deadly threat.

Ultimately, just as during the Second World War, the only way back from the threats presented is by many nations uniting their efforts and cooperating with each other. No single country can produce a vaccine for Covid 19 and distribute it. No single country can stop the planet warming up, the melting of the ice caps, the inexorable rise of sea levels and the increasing violence of weather events. But, together, we can. The best way to honour the people we remember 75 years on from VE Day is to unite our efforts in the interest of peace, a common prosperity and the preservation of our planet and our freedoms, so hard-won during and after the Second World War.

Amen.