

My dear Friends

How will you mark the 75th anniversary of VE Day?

Had things gone to plan, we might have spent 8th May having a street party with friends, or joining in with afternoon tea on Ashby's Bath Grounds. We might have heard the church bells ring out to signal peace, or found ourselves going 'all Vera Lynn' and singing 'We'll meet again'.

With communal events for VE Day 75 cancelled, we're being invited to mark the occasion as households. There's BBC Make a Difference 'Great British Bunting' initiative which encourages us to deck out our front gardens in red, white and blue bunting, and a suggestion that we might have our own celebratory picnic under that same bunting, waving to passers-by as we do.

St Helen's Church was due to host Ashby's civic service for VE Day 75 and we're still going to do that online, via our Facebook Page on 10th May at 10.30am. Why not join us? We'll be remembering with *sorrow* the events that led to war, and the horrors of the war; with *thanksgiving* the sacrifices made by millions of ordinary people during that time; with *determination* our part in working for peace.

Today, Europe is in the grip of another kind of war with Covid-19.

'We'll meet again' has become our lock-down anthem. Like its earlier incarnation in wartime, it's become a rallying cry, a statement of faith, that better days are coming when we will be together once more. And as at our VE Day 75 service, we mark each day with the same mixture of sorrow, thanksgiving and determination; sorrow at the awful loss of life; thanksgiving for those key workers sacrificing so much to combat the illness, and determination to play our part in serving our communities.

I'm not sure what 'victory' over Covid-19 will look like, exactly. A vaccine, perhaps, to ward off further pandemics; families and friends mixing freely again; a return to school and work; unfettered departures on holiday; rescheduled weddings and house moves?

I wonder. Could we aspire to *more* than this? Might a more meaningful victory be, not 'back to normal', but a 'new normal' where we value our relationships more dearly, where we consume more carefully, where we travel more thoughtfully, where we expend time more sparingly, where we are content with less and local and much, much simpler? Might a longer-lasting victory be shown in better-paced lives, in stronger communities, in a fairer sharing of resources, in cherishing creation which, in lock-down, is finally breathing again? Might not this be a closer reflection of God's Kingdom which Christians are called to build; a Kingdom where we are good stewards of creation, where we work for justice, and honour those closest to us, whilst loving our neighbours?

While you have a little more time, just now, could you think about what you've gained during this time; about what you've gained and what you'd like to retain when all of this is over? Think: what would 'victory in Europe', across the world, over Covid-19 really look like for me, for us - and what can I do to secure it?

With much love,

Revd Mary