



# **March Team Ministry**

**March Team St John, St Mary, St Peter, St Wendreda**

## **VJ DAY 75<sup>th</sup> ANNIVERSARY**

*A service had been prepared nationally before the lockdown. There are broadcast services and events on 15<sup>th</sup> August, but as we are unable to have a local service we offer you these resources for this significant occasion.*

*Hymns suggested include, Praise my soul, Lord for the years, Now thank we all our God, Guide me O thou great redeemer, King of glory King of peace.*

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**In the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.  
The Lord is here; his Spirit is with us.  
Heaviness may endure for a night: but joy comes in the morning.  
God has been our refuge and our strength: a present help in time of trouble.**

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Dear friends,

today commemorates the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of VJ Day, the day when Japan announced its surrender to the Allies, bringing an end to the Second World War. We are conscious of our need for God's forgiveness for the sin and the desire to dominate others that leads to conflict between people, and war between nations.

We express sorrow for the atrocities of war; we pray that former enemies may be forgiven, and that we may be freed from feelings of fear, revenge, and xenophobia, and finally, that we may be thankful for times of peace and find joy in the company of one another.

As we remember the many soldiers, sailors, and airmen who gave their lives restraining evil and opposing tyranny, so we also come in thanksgiving for the years of peace that the nations of the world have enjoyed since the Second World War.

We remember with joy those who gathered on that first VJ Day, and grateful for the laughter and love that follows times of sadness and loss. But above all things, let us pray that God's will may be done on earth as it is in heaven, and say **Our Father...**

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### **A Prayer for VJ Day**

God our Father, in the dying and rising of your Son Jesus Christ, you have brought life and salvation out of cruelty and death. We mark Victory in Japan in gratitude for the courage of the Allied forces who suffered for freedom in the Far East campaign and in sorrow for all that hinders the coming of your kingdom of peace. Give us wisdom to learn from the bitter memories of war, and hearts that long for the unity of all nations. We ask all this in the name of Jesus, in whom there is no east or west, no north or south, but one fellowship of love across the whole earth. **Amen**

### **For those who served and died in World War II**

O God of truth and justice, we hold before you those men and women who have died in active service, particularly in the Second World War. As we honour their courage and cherish their memory, may we put our faith in your future; for you are the source of life and hope, now and for ever. **Amen**

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### **Reading; Isaiah 2 v1-4**

In days to come  
the mountain of the Lord's house  
shall be established as the highest of the mountains,  
and shall be raised above the hills;  
all the nations shall stream to it.  
Many peoples shall come and say,  
'Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord,  
to the house of the God of Jacob;  
that he may teach us his ways  
and that we may walk in his paths.'  
For out of Zion shall go forth instruction,  
and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.  
He shall judge between the nations,  
and shall arbitrate for many peoples;  
they shall beat their swords into ploughshares,  
and their spears into pruning-hooks;  
nation shall not lift up sword against nation,  
neither shall they learn war any more.

### **Reading; John 15 v9-17**

Jesus said to the disciples "As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love.

I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete.

'This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you. I do not call you servants any longer, because the servant does not know what the master is doing; but I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father. You did not choose me but I chose you. And I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last, so that the Father will give you whatever you ask him in my name. I am giving you these commands so that you may love one another.'

### **Reading; Matthew 5 v43-48**

Jesus said to the crowd; 'You have heard that it was said, "You shall love your neighbour and hate your enemy."

But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be children of your Father in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous. For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax-collectors do the same? And if you greet only your brothers and sisters, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

## *Meditation*

75 years ago the Japanese leadership unconditionally surrendered, although in some places the fighting went on for several months. The war in the Pacific has left several legacies. The war began with the Japanese preemptive strike on the US Naval Fleet at Pearl Harbour, and proceeded with rapid Japanese expansion through Malaya and Singapore, the conquest of many Indonesian islands and oil fields. In the west on land, there were bitter campaigns in the jungles of Burma as the advance was halted before India. In the east, long range air and carrier battles followed with the reconquest of islands large, like the Philippines, or small, like Okinawa on the very threshold of Japan itself. Some of the other themes are the very cheapness of human life shown by Japanese use of suicide bombers, and even more so by the treatment of, and contempt for, prisoners of war shown by the Japanese, and their exploitation and starvation in labour projects. Following massive carpet bombing of Japan, the war was brought to an end by the dropping of two atomic bombs. It was a war fought against imperialism, ideas of racial superiority, domination, contempt for humanity, and for a different world order.

The war led to not only a rebuilding of Japan, but its re-invention as a very different political, economic and cultural identity. It also led to the creation state of China which has evolved into the significant economic and world power we know today. It led to a world which has lived in a nuclear shadow of fear and threat of destruction that has ebbed and flowed on the geopolitical stage ever since.

War always involves a suspension of the normal codes of human conduct. The norm of “not killing” is suspended, as are all too often the definitions and codes of conduct over property (stealing and ownership), and of personal integrity (rape and assault). In war, we no longer require people who kill in retaliation or self-defence to answer such charges in court, we suspend the civil code of conduct in these war situations. After the mid twentieth century wars we did no longer allow a defence of “only obeying orders” to crimes of genocide and atrocity, but it was largely only the losing side who were held to account. There were far fewer war crimes trials as a result of the pacific war than the war in Europe. Japan had not ratified the Geneva convention, and had a culture in the 1940’s that despised those who surrendered, as well as a view of racial hierarchy that was able to view many people as sub-human. There does of course, it should be remembered, remain very real debate about the morality of carpet bombing and nuclear weapons, which can, in my opinion, only be justified if you accept suspension and disregard of normal human conduct in war situations.

Turning to our faith tradition, we have to acknowledge there is no simple definitive answer to these significant questions. There are large swathes of the Old Testament that record warfare, and some, like the occupation of the promised land, are written as if it is God’s will. Others, when the Jewish kingdoms are small and vulnerable, are written with war as a response by the underdog to imperialism, colonialism, oppression and ethnic cleansing. But we also know that the parts of the Old Testament which are read by Christians as pointing to Jesus as the Messiah, often emphasise that he is the “Prince of Peace” and that in the new Kingdom of God that he brings “swords shall be made into ploughshares and spears into pruning hooks”. Christians have taken the Old Testament to show the Messiah as the “suffering servant” rather than the warrior conqueror.

The Church, as an institution both human and divine, has a very mixed track record; sometimes being on the side of arms being born by nation states, sometimes legitimising rebellion in the cause of justice and freedom, sometimes trying to put restraints on the conduct of war and to define what makes a justifiable war, and sometimes being pacifistic.

Today’s two New Testament Gospel passages emphasise love of self, neighbour and indeed enemy. Yes, “greater love has no one than to lay down their life for their friends” but this is about laying down life not taking the lives of others. The pertinent question is whether these teachings of Jesus are hopeless ideals or something for all times and places, or whether they are to be suspended in extreme times such as found in war.

So, as we remember with thanksgiving those who served and those civilians who suffered cruelly in the Pacific war, we cannot answer the questions as to what might have happened if we had not fought at all, or in the way we did. But, we can work for peace here and now, we can drive out the devaluing of all human life and ideas of imperialism and racial superiority and continue to wrestle in our following of the Prince of Peace.

### **An Act of Commitment**

*We pledge ourselves anew to the service of God and all humanity: that we may help, encourage and comfort others, and support those working for the relief of the needy and for the peace and welfare of the nations.*

Lord God our Father, we pledge ourselves to serve you and all humankind, in the cause of peace, for the relief of want and suffering, and for the praise of your name. Guide us by your Spirit; give us wisdom; give us courage; give us hope; and keep us faithful now and always.

**Amen.**

*Lord our God, as we remember, teach us the ways of peace. As we treasure memories, teach us to hope. As we give thanks for the sacrifices of the past, help us to make your future in this world, until your kingdom come.*

**Amen.**

### **Collect for Peace**

Almighty God, from whom all thoughts of truth and peace proceed: kindle in the hearts of all people the true love of peace; and guide with your pure and peaceable wisdom those who take counsel for the nations of the earth; that in tranquillity your kingdom may go forward, till the earth is filled with the knowledge of thy love; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

**Amen.**

### **A prayer for the Sovereign**

Almighty God, the fountain of all goodness, bless our Sovereign Lady, Queen Elizabeth, and all who are in authority under her; that they may order all things in wisdom and equity, righteousness and peace, to the honour of your name, and the good of your Church and people; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

**Amen.**

### **For the peace of the world**

O God, who would fold both heaven and earth in a single peace; that the design of your great love lighten upon the waste of our wraths and sorrows and give peace to your church, peace among nations, peace in our dwellings and peace in our hearts; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

**Amen**

### **Blessing**

Most holy God and Father, hear our prayers for all who strive for peace and all who fight for justice. Help us, who today remember the cost of war, to work for a better tomorrow; and as we commend to you lives lost in terror and conflict, bring us all, in the end, to the peace of your presence. May God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, bless us and preserve us in peace.

**Amen.**