

VE DAY REFLECTION

We've all seen pictures of the VE Day celebrations in London in 1945. Huge crowds of people dancing in the streets, smiles and laughter everywhere; loud cheering, especially when Winston Churchill appeared on the balcony of Buckingham Palace. Some of you will be able to remember those scenes. Maybe you were even there?

The joy was as much relief that the war was over, than victory and the defeat of an oppressor. I imagine there was a sense of life beginning again, in safety, with hope reborn. Yet behind the smiles and the cheers was also great sadness: for the loss of those who would never return from the war; the loss of homes and loved ones; the loss of a world they once knew; and apprehension for what the future would look like. And of course, years of austerity lay ahead – into which people of my generation were born.

So the joy – so real, so palpable, so entirely appropriate – also masked deep feelings of loss and sorrow. It was temporary.

Our service today began with the reminder that we have *joyfully* come together. And so we have. Virtually anyway. We rejoice at the freedom we have, so dearly bought. We give thanks for the sacrifice of so many for the greater good and for future generations. And yet...and yet, we know all is not well. We are grateful for this moment of celebration, but we know there are troubles ahead for all of us.

So is joy just a fleeting experience? Is it just a relief from the tedium and struggles of life? Is it a kind of pressure cooker experience: we have to let off steam now and then? It need not be so. According to the Bible, joy is one of the fruits of the Holy Spirit – it is something that grows in response to faith. It characterises the life of the believer: And, as Archbishop Desmond Tutu has said, *We are*

fragile creatures... it is from this weakness, not despite it, that we discover the possibility of true joy.

Isn't that a beautiful picture painted by the prophet Zechariah in our reading? Old men and women contentedly resting on their walking sticks, while children play noisily around them. This is joy and freedom: the life we all want. It is, in fact, an image of how things are when God is present, and when society enjoys his faithfulness and righteousness, and practises them. The people of Israel are emerging from a time of exile, and returning to their land. And God is with them, calling them his own people. The joy comes from that fact: the resting and the playing are the consequences of people being in company with God. Living God's way of faithfulness and righteousness. They are at peace.

The coming of Jesus into our world tells us that God is indeed with us. By his cross, his love wins

our salvation from all that afflicts us; his resurrection opens the door to eternity. When, through repentance and faith we accept these gifts, and live God's way, we may have peace within. And because we are at peace with God, we may have joy. In 1945, the Peace led to joy at the moment. But the peace and joy that come from God are eternal. We live now in the light of the life to come.

So, peace and joy belong together. As someone once wrote, 'God's peace is joy resting; and his joy is peace dancing.'

As we remember and celebrate this day, amidst our current problems, may joy and peace characterise our whole lives, resting in God, hoping, waiting for God to heal creation. Then, *all* may have joy and peace with God. For ever.

And in the meantime, practise faith and righteousness.