

OT: Micah 4.1–4

NT: Corinthians 5.16–21

I, like most of us here today, am a member of that generation who have been fortunate enough not to have experienced war first hand. A child of the 1950s, a baby boomer, who has benefited from all the freedoms given to us by the previous generations. Their sacrifices allowing us life rich in many blessings. It is right that we come here today to remember with thanks all of those who, 80 years ago, gave so much the ordinary men and women of this city and of this nation.

It is fitting that we meet today here in Our Lady and St Nicholas rebuilt following the destruction of the earlier 18th Century church in the blitz of the 20 December 1940. The cross on the wall of the St Peter Chapel to my right, was formed from roof timbers salvaged from the ruins on that December morning 85 years ago, remain a constant reminder of the sacrifice of so many. The then Rector, David Railton, shaping the timbers into a cross a symbol of the new life that would come from the darkness of war.

Perhaps it is no coincidence that it was the same man who, some 20 years earlier, had initiated the Tomb of the Unknown Warrior in Westminster Abbey and, who it is said, provided the Union Flag that was draped over the coffin of the soldier, whose identity remains unknown, as it was brought from the Western Front to Westminster Abbey. The idea of a Tomb of the Unknown Warrior was first conceived in 1916 by David Railton, who, while serving as an army chaplain on the Western Front, had seen a grave marked by a rough cross, which bore the pencil-written legend 'An Unknown British Soldier'. Unknown in death but in life a member of that earlier generation who gave so much when called.

Although as I said as I began, most here have been fortunate to have not experienced war first hand, I am sure many of us will have listened over the last few days to the stories of the veterans and in the re-telling of their war time experiences has recalled the experiences of their own parents and families. The Second World War was truly a war unprecedented in the impact of all of that generation.

Allow me for a moment, to recall the experiences of four members of my own family. My father, like many of the young men of this city born during the first world war, saw the shadow of war looming and in 1938 joined the Territorial Army and, having met my mother in a dance hall in Wavertree, married in 1939 was called up into the Royal Artillery, Gnr 909211 Addy. His wartime saw him leave his job as a labourer in Jacobs biscuits in Aintree to defend the airfields of the battle of Britain. I recall him telling me of nights spent in a slit trench on the cliffs of the south coast waiting for the imminent invasion. The rest of his war was spent in the deserts of Iraq and Persia. On VE Day, he had been away from Liverpool for four years and was preparing to travel East until the ending of the war in Japan some 90 days later. He returned to my mother in late 1945. She meanwhile, had spent her war waiting and hoping making parts for war planes in a factory in Woolton and watching the city burn in those awful blitzes of 1940 and 1941.

My wife's parents, although they met in the aftermath of the war, their lives were equally disrupted by it. My father in law in a reserved occupation as a skilled metal worker, left his

home in the Wirral to the shipyards of Glasgow. My mother in law left her job as a secretary in an insurance company to serve as a member of the WRNS here in Liverpool, just a step away from this church in Western Approaches and in the Royal Liver Building . I am sure she would have walked past this church on a daily basis perhaps with the Top-Secret papers that she worked on and the details of the convoys formed up in waters of the Mersey.

Four ordinary people whose lives were overtaken by war, and I am sure all here today will have those personal memories of their own families. Sadly, this is true of the millions of lives lost in the second world war, those people who lost their lives on both sides. The soldiers, airmen and sailors, the civilians who died in the blitz or in the allied bombing of German cities, or in the sieges of Stalingrad or Berlin. Ordinary people caught up in War.

Today it is right that we remember the Victory in Europe 80 years ago, but as we remember the people of the wartime generation who gave so much to stand up to tyranny and evil, we should also remember all who lost their lives and in remembrance seek to do all within our power to ensure that we never forget. The prophet Micah, describes in rich metaphor the beating of swords in to plough shares, spears into pruning hooks nations not lifting swords against nations new age of peace being ushered in. Sadly, we know that peace was short-lived however, Micah also prophesied just a few verses later of the coming forth of the one out of Bethlehem who will stand and feed his flock 'the one of Peace'. The Christ who Paul, writing to the Church in Corinth, that we heard in our second reading 'Is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation'.

A ministry of reconciliation that each of us, the ordinary people of our generation can use to ensure that we pass on to the next generation the peace that we have known. Sadly, that hard-won peace is a fragile peace, even as we meet today across the continent of Europe, drones, missiles and artillery shells kill countless innocent lives and in Gaza and Israel, India and Pakistan, Yemen and Sudan war continues.

War continues as long as people allow doctrines to replace dialogue. This week we have seen cause for optimism, in the election of an American Pope, Pope Leo XIV, who used his first Papal Mass to describe the church not in terms of grandeur or wealth but in terms of the people of God 'For we are the people whom God has chosen as his own, so that we may declare the wonderful deeds of him who called us out of darkness into his marvellous light'.

A wonderful counter to the words emanating from another American constantly in our news. We also experienced here in Liverpool over the last few days a wonderful example of the power of reconciliation diplomats for over 27 European countries coming to recognise Europe Day a celebration of all that comes from understanding that in our differences we are the same coming to commit to work together for mutual flourishing.

As we remember today all that was given 80 years ago so that we could live in peace, let each of us be prepared to take the ministry of reconciliation into our lives and never to forget the sacrifices of so many 'ordinary people'.

Fr Bill Addy