

**A Sermon by the Right Revered Dr Christopher Cocksworth
Bishop of Coventry**

for the 75th Anniversary of VE Day, Friday 8th May 2020

2 Corinthians 5:16-21

Dear people of Coventry and Warwickshire, and all who join us today.

There is so much to cause us anxiety in these present times of Coronavirus. And we long to be delivered from this virus that is causing so much harm to us.

But today we step aside from our present worries to give thanks for a deliverance from another plague – the plague of war, and the evil virus that threatened the world in the 1930's and 40's.

We give thanks for our brave parents, grandparents, great grandparents who suffered much in the days of war, and sacrificed so much for the greater good of peace.

Among them were those who laid down their lives for our freedom, and they are especially on our hearts today.

We give thanks for the amazing spirit of endurance during those war years throughout our region and country, none more so than here in the City of Coventry. A city that would not bow its head in despair during its multiple bombings, not even in the terrible night of November 14th 1940, when so much of the city was destroyed and so many of our people killed.

We give thanks for these 75 years of peace in Europe and the healing of the wounds of history and the reconciliation of relationships between former enemies into firm and enduring friendships.

Then, in the second world war, the world was divided and nations fought each other. Now, in this war against Coronavirus – this third world war – the world is united against a common enemy. We are bound together in a common endeavour for health. We are a global community and – in this interconnected world – we will stand or fall together.

Even during the worst of days of the second world war, there were voices in this country, in other parts of Europe, even brave voices in Germany among the resisters to the Nazi regime, who were saying that, as important as it was to win the war against tyranny and oppression, it would more important to win the peace. To build a new Europe where war

would be unthinkable, a new world that would never go to war against itself again. On this day we must pay tribute to their vision and to all of those who built the post-war peace that in this country we still enjoy.

In our day in this battle against the virus, we must not only resolve ourselves to protect each other and to defeat this threat to our way of life, we must also commit to building a better, safer, healthier world, and to join with other nations in a great movement for healing and health.

This great Cathedral played its noble part in building peace, and it did so through its commitment to reconciliation between people: reconciliation rooted in a common prayer to God to forgive each of us – every person, community and country for our part in the attitudes and actions that lead to conflict.

That same road of reconciliation will need to be travelled to win the peace following the defeat of Covid-19, and to build a better, safer, fairer and healthier world.

We will need to continue the same social reconciliation that we have experienced so wonderfully in recent weeks – the spirit of togetherness, of supporting each other, reaching out to the isolated, feeding the hungry, appreciating those who serve us who are so often taken for granted. A safer, healthier world demands that we support each other at every level.

We will need an economic reconciliation between peoples, so that health and wealth are more fairly spread in our city, our communities and our world. In this land people who are poorer are suffering more from Coronavirus than richer people. And in other lands 250 million people are threatened with starvation because of the virus. Reconciliation between the rich and poor will lead to a healthier, safer world. We are all made in the image of God and each is of infinite value.

We will need ecological reconciliation. The costs of coronavirus have been high, and there is much that has damaged us. But it is good to hear the birds sing, to breathe cleaner air and to realise that we do not need to travel as much, even into work. Reconciliation with our planet will lead to a healthier, safer world. This earth is a precious gift of God where we can flourish if we care for it.

Many of the architects of peace after the Second World War, believed that lasting peace relied on a spiritual renewal, and they looked to Jesus Christ – his life of love, his death for our reconciliation, his resurrection and abiding presence – as our strength and inspiration.

Jesus came to reconcile us to God, to put us right with God, so that in God's peace and love and justice we could be right with each other and with our whole inhabited world. Our reading speaks of Jesus' work of reconciliation. It implores us: 'Be reconciled to God'.¹ Turn to God and find hope. Believe in God and find strength. Confess to God and find forgiveness. Put your life in the hands of Jesus Christ and become a new creation.

'Be ambassadors for Christ',² the Bible says: and build a better city, community and country. Build a better world, a reconciled world, a world where we live well with each other. A world where we live well with nature.

It is for a better world that my grandfather and father, and uncles and aunts fought during the world wars of the 20th Centuries, and yours did the same. It was for a better world that the people of Coventry, the region and the whole country suffered so much, and still held out hope.

Let us in the 21st Century win not only the war but also the peace against Coronavirus, and build a safer, healthier world – for that would be a fitting tribute to those who laid down their lives for our peace and freedom, our health and wealth.

Thanks be to God for the victory of peace!

Let us pray for the victory of health!

¹ 2 Corinthians 5:21

² 5:21