



10 May 2015
BBC Radio 4 Sunday Worship
What Kind of Victory?
Micah 4 vv. 1–4
1 Corinthians 15 vv. 50–58

Victory

By Major General Timothy Cross

Victory in Europe on Friday the 8th May 1945 came after the nation had pulled together under the inspirational leadership provided by a Royal family that had just come through the drama of an abdication; and by Winston Churchill, who became Prime Minister on May 10th 1940 – just as most of Western and Northern Europe, and a large part of North Africa was being lost and we were about to face Germany and the Axis alone.

Between the declaration of war in Sep 1939 and late 1942 Britain and her allies suffered virtually continuous bitter defeats, despite the huge bravery and sacrifices of the men and women at home, overseas – and under and on the seas in-between; and especially by those who saw us through the Battle of Britain in the air.

Winston's Churchill's speeches have gone down in history as the glue that held the nation together in those early years. Whilst there were those who wanted to sue for peace, he stood firm - always prepared to face up to the brutal facts and publicly acknowledge the hardships that the nation as a whole would have to go through. He talked not only of national survival and national interest, but also of the noble causes for which Britain was fighting - freedom, Christian civilisation, and the rights of small nations. His leadership inspired and united our people to give of their skills and talents – of their very lives - in order to bring about victory; and in doing so he and our nation gave hope to others around the world.

To stand firm required Courage – an attribute which Churchill himself called "the first of human qualities, because it guarantees all the others." And it was his courage and the courage of the many millions of men and women who fought in the military campaigns and who strived and suffered at home that carried us through.

Courage like that of Desmond Pelly DFC - my father-in-law - who, as a 21 year old pilot led the crew of a Lancaster shot down over Germany on their 40th mission. One died immediately in the night fighter attack and, realising that there was no other option, he ordered the rest of the crew to abandon the aircraft; he dived out of the forward hatch at 10,000 feet with the aircraft spiralling down; it blew up seconds later. Two chutes failed to open; the survivors were captured. Desmond died earlier his year aged 91, but 55,000 of his companions did not survive the war.

Courage is about going forward because we know in our hearts that we cannot go back without destroying what we hold to be true. It means carrying on to the end despite the opposition. It means overcoming doubt and uncertainty, even when others fall away or undermine the cause. It means holding on to the vision, trusting that justice and righteousness will ultimately prevail.

Another courageous and hard won victory took place 2000 years ago. Knowing He would be abandoned by His friends during His ministry and trial - and by God Himself on the Cross - we all too easily forget that Jesus Christ could simply have walked away at Gethsemane; left the Garden and headed off into the night. But He didn't. He stayed; and paid a heavy price. But out of apparent failure Jesus secured an eternal Victory, not a short term one; and He calls us to join Him in that victory.

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Doing God's will in a fallen world is inherently dangerous; it is scary because He is asking us to choose between a life that looks successful and a life that is actually significant – between a life that wins the applause of our peers and a life that transforms the lives of others – transforms them as a caterpillar is transformed into a butterfly – into freedom. In choosing to serve God through Christ we find true identity and purpose – true life; life in all its fullness. But, over and over again in Scripture, Jesus teaches us that we will suffer for following Him – and if our lives as Christians don't feel dangerous then we should probably pause and check to see if it's Jesus we're following. For untold numbers of people around the world danger is ever present. Victory in Europe in 1945 was hugely important; but whilst in so many ways we live today in a very different country – in a very different world – it is nonetheless one where evil still prowls like a roaring lion, and courageous men and women are called to stand firm. And many of course do.

Let me leave you with these words, taken from a poem called 'God Knows' – more popularly known as 'The Gate of the Year' - by Minnie Louise Haskins; words widely acclaimed when used by King George VI as the closing lines of his Christmas message in 1939 as the dark clouds of war were forming:

"I said to the man who stood at the gate of the year: "Give me a light that I may tread safely into the unknown." And he replied:

"Go out into the darkness and put your hand into the Hand of God. That shall be to you better than light and safer than a known way."

That seems to me to be a pretty good message for us today; and I pray that His Almighty hand will indeed guide and uphold us all as we move forward into our uncertain but ultimately victorious future.

Amen