

2nd before Lent St. George's Cathedral Jerusalem Gen 1.1-2.3; Rom 8.18-25; Mt 6.25-end

It's wonderful to be with you here today. Thank you Archbishop Hosam for the invitation, and thank you for the invitation to preach. I know that many of us here this morning have come from many different places to gather here in this holy city, in this holy land. We come to share with you and stand with you, you who live in this holy and broken place, and in so many ways hold it for us, and for the sake of the world.

I also come from a holy and a broken place. Not on the same scale as all that surrounds us here, but known by many across the world initially because of its destruction, and then through its rebuilding and work in reconciliation - which we celebrate here this morning, as St. George's joins the international community of the cross of nails. (Or joins again, or re-affirms its membership ...)

The City of Coventry was destroyed by enemy bombing on the night of November 14th, 1940 - almost exactly 85 years ago. As part of that terrible night, when 600 people died and tens of thousands of homes were destroyed, the beautiful Cathedral which I serve went up in flames. My predecessor, Provost Richard Howard, had been on the roof trying to put out the incendiaries but it was too great a task. The next morning, he returned to the smoking ruins and as he looked around him, he recorded in his diary, "it seemed to me that we had shared in the crucifixion of Christ ... but then it came to me in a flash that if we had shared in his crucifixion, we would also share in his resurrection. The Cathedral would rise again." A message of hope, not despair.

Images of the burned out Cathedral went out across the world, as did the Provost's faith in a rebuilt future. But what was even more striking was his hope that it would not just be buildings that would rise again, but also relationships. On Christmas morning, just six weeks after the bombing, he was on the radio for the BBC world service, broadcast across the English speaking world, saying: *we are trying, hard as it may be, to banish all thoughts of revenge; ... we are going to try to make a kinder, simpler, a more Christ Child-like sort of world in the days beyond this strife.* It was a pledge for reconciliation, all the more remarkable because it was made in the midst of war, when the outcome was far from certain. It was not a pacifist message - he also said, *... we are bracing ourselves to finish the tremendous job of saving the world from tyranny and cruelty ...* it was a realistic message of hope for a peaceful and shared future, recognising the journey would be long and hard. The hope remained of cities rebuilt, relationships restored, reconciliation not revenge - but it was as though there were two horizons. One, in the short term, where resistance, with force if necessary, to defend themselves against the enemy, The other, longer term, was the hope for rebuilding the relationship with the enemy, for a lasting peace.

And it was not just idle talk. Within less than two years of the end of the second world war, peace making missions were exchanged between Coventry and cities in Germany which had been destroyed in allied bombing - first Kiel, in northern Germany, where an RAF officer from Coventry was based for the occupation, and later Berlin, Hamburg, and most famously Dresden, where a team of young people from the Cathedral went to help rebuild a destroyed hospital run by a religious order of deaconesses. Relationships were being rebuilt, along with the cities belonging to those who had been enemies.

In the ruins of Coventry's first Cathedral, Provost Howard had the words *Father Forgive* carved deep into the stone, picked out in gold. He was quoting Jesus' words from the cross, but including his own community and even himself amongst those who needed forgiveness. Our core text in Coventry is this: *All this is from God, who reconciled us to Godself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation (2 Cor 5.18).* We often speak of a *journey of reconciliation - from a fractured past towards a shared future.* It's a challenging journey, which requires courage: we have also often said that *you have not really engaged in the work of reconciliation until your own people think that you have betrayed them.* When you have crossed the road to be with those on the other side - but that's where Jesus may be calling us to join him.

We have developed three priorities, which are shared across our network, to describe this journey of reconciliation: *healing the wounds of history; learning to live with difference and celebrate diversity; building a culture of justice and peace.* This is how we put reconciliation into practice. We have partners working in racial justice in the US and South Africa, addressing the colonial

legacy in Canada, here in Israel Palestine and New Zealand Aotearoa, economic equality in so many places, the rise of the far right in Germany and elsewhere. People reaching out into fractures, brokenness, believing that with God's help the world can be different. And the sign for us on our journey are crosses of nails, made originally from nails which had fallen from the burning roof of the Cathedral, formed into a cross as a sign of Jesus' presence in the midst of destruction and loss. Today, these crosses - like the one I have brought to you - are made in a prison workshop in Wurzburg in Germany, itself a place of brokenness and, hopefully, healing.

This journey from ruins to restoration resonates across our network, and nowhere is it more relevant than here in Jerusalem. As I read the readings set for this morning, as we begin our journey towards Lent, Holy Week and Easter (following the transition of Candlemas last week, turning from Bethlehem towards Jerusalem, and Simeon's proclamation, *now* I have seen God's salvation) I found a resonance in the abiding sense of trust in God which permeates them. The account of creation in Genesis is all about God's order, which although broken around us will one day be restored in the new creation. Paul's letter to the Romans is realistic about the sufferings of the present time, and writes of groaning, eager longing, labour pains, and then patience ... and ultimately and most importantly, hope. and if we cry out in despair that we can't see any hope, he challenges and reassures us, saying "*hope for something that is seen is not hope at all.*" We tread this journey of reconciliation, not in denial of the chaos on either side, but in hope for a new future. Jesus' words in Matthew can ring hollow if we are not careful: to whom in this land can we whimsically say, just thing about the flowers and the birds - God looks after them, doesn't he? You can quickly point to flowers and birds that have died from drought or starvation Perhaps more helpful to allow the passage to lead us to affirm the truth that we can't add to our life by worrying about it. Above all, we are to strive for God's order, God's way ... to do all we can to play our part, and trust that God will play his. Today's trouble is enough for today - well, that's certainly true - we are called not to worry for tomorrow, but to look forward in realistic hope.

Those of us who are here as visitors are called to be witnesses, like the disciples telling the story of what we have seen and heard, to the rest of the world. For you who carry the burden the privilege and the joy of living here, thank you.

My prayer is that the Coventry story in its small way, but also countless other stories from across the world, may serve as an encouragement that even here in this most holy and most broken of places, we can find hope that God will lead us through ... and to know that in the cross of nails is a sign that it is in the midst of the most unimaginable devastation that God will reveal God's of love and hope in Christ - for this is the message of the cross, forged here in metal, and also in the crucible of our hearts, as we discover Christ with us again and again in the journey from the old creation to the new, the journey of reconciliation.

Now to the one who by the power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine, to God be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, for ever and ever. Amen. Eph 3. 20,21