

Friends

After more than half a century of church attendance, it is difficult to find a hymn that doesn't hold memories. I was particularly moved by this last Sunday when we sang "Lord of all hopefulness", a hymn which was used at both the membership service and the funeral of a member at Cookham Rise. Then we sang "What a friend we have in Jesus", a hymn whose final line ("Thou wilt find a solace there") was always misunderstood by my uncle in his youth as "Thou wilt find a shoelace there". Songs and music carry our memories and this was why Charles Wesley wrote so many hymns. It allowed the generally illiterate people who came to his brother's open air services to hold on to the theology in their minds, through the catchy words and memorable tunes. No matter if the meat of John's sermon had been missed, so long as they went away singing "My chains fell off, my heart was free, I rose, went forth and followed thee." Who cared if they understood the "Four Alls" (All need to be saved; all can be saved; all can know they are saved; all can be saved to the uttermost) if they could sing "Jesu, thou art all compassion, pure unbounded love thou art; visit us with thy salvation, enter every trembling heart."

During this week of celebration marking the 80th year since V.E. Day, we will also be hearing many songs: "We'll meet again"; "There'll be bluebirds over the white cliffs of Dover"; "There'll always be an England" and so on. The Bible is full of stories about warfare, land and the importance of freedom and home. As in our own time, we see times when this is good and important, and times when it leads to xenophobia and hatred of "the other". Not for nothing does the Bible repeatedly tell us to care for the stranger and the foreigner in our midst, often linking it to captivity in Egypt by adding "for you yourselves were strangers in the land of Egypt."

The second world war was a time of destruction, fear and difficulty for many nations, including our own. It is right that we mark its ending and the great sacrifices that were made. Let us however, never let that celebration, or any other that focuses on national pride, tip over into lack of care or expressions of hatred, for those who are foreigners among us.

God bless, Vicci