

The service, which was attended by The Queen and The Duke of Edinburgh, was organised by a federation of organisations representing Far East



by the BBC.

[Watch BBC coverage of the service](#) (Bishop Nigel Stock's sermon starts at 27 minutes)

Read the text of Bishop Nigel Stock's sermon:

“For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

Romans 8: 38-39

In October 1946, Bishop Leonard Wilson preached on the BBC Radio Sunday service. Leonard Wilson was Bishop of Singapore at the time of its capture by the Japanese Imperial Army, and was eventually interned in the notorious Changi prison camp.

Accused of being part of a spy network within the camp, he was interrogated under torture, and in the BBC broadcast said this:

“In the middle of that torture they asked me if I still believed in God. When, by God’s help, I said, ‘I do’, they asked me why God did not save me, and by the help of his Holy Spirit, I said, ‘God does save me. He does not save me by freeing me from pain or punishment, but he saves me by giving me the spirit to bear it.’”

You have to read the whole passage to know that this was not easily said or achieved, and as with any human being Leonard Wilson had his moments of doubt and despair. He longed to be able to exercise the Christian virtue of forgiveness but that was a grimly difficult task:

“I looked at their faces as they stood around and took it in turn to flog, and their faces were hard and cruel and some of them were evidently enjoying their cruelty. But by the grace of God I saw those men not as they were but as they had been. Once they were little children playing with their brothers and sisters and happy in their parents’ love, and it is hard to hate little children.”

Such stories of human courage and moral virtue in the grimmest of circumstances abound from the conflict that we remember today on this 70th anniversary of VJ Day.

The more I learn of that conflict, the more I feel very presumptuous standing here and saying anything at all, as part of a generation that has not had to endure world war.

Yet I feel bound to speak, as my family was marked by these events as I guess have the families of all those gathered here.

My father’s brother was killed at Kohima, my father-in-law fought with the 81st Division of the West Africa Frontier Force in Burma, and my mother’s twin brother spent three and a half years as a POW in Japan.

It was only occasionally that one heard anything of this growing up, so reticent were people to speak, and often it was left too late for more detail.

But perhaps because of my relatives I have always been moved by the human stories and those human chains of connection that make you delve deeper. So the priest who presided at my marriage, was the brother of the officer who interpreted for General Perceval at the fall of Singapore. Cyril Wild the interpreter, and son of the Bishop of Newcastle went into captivity, volunteered to go up with his men to the appalling conditions of the Burma Railway, and saved numerous lives because he could intercede with the Japanese commanders in their own language. He was called by the Japanese “The Tall Man who never sleeps” because he was constantly pleading the cause of someone condemned to die. He survived captivity, as did the Union Flag that he carried at the surrender negotiation which he hid, and which was raised when the Allied Forces re-occupied Singapore.

All the stories of this conflict that I keep coming across deserve retelling. Be they that of a Nigerian private soldier which I read of recently, Isaac Fadebeyo. who survived wounded in the Arakan and was preserved by Rohingya muslim villagers or the wonderful story of another of the regimental padre in Changi, Eric Cordingley and the Brass cross that was made for him out of shell casing which established the presence of a place of Christian worship in Changi on the Burma Railway and back at Changi.

And what too of those who inspired those they led to make the grim effort required for victory in such bitter, fierce, and cruel warfare? Field Marshal Slim is still quoted today in command courses, and still spoken of as a soldier’s soldier. The sheer personality of Lord Mountbatten of Burma inspired in a way that we barely begin to understand in our sheltered world.

These are just a very few of the people and stories that could be told.

But why tell any of them, why remember?

We remember because we need to be reminded of what the human spirit can achieve. It applies to people of all faiths and none. But the sacrifice should not be forgotten, not least of those who did not survive battle or imprisonment.

Out of all the ignoble and cruel acts of this conflict, there were many that speak of hope and what might be possible. If I might quote my Uncle who gave a talk twenty years ago on his experience of being a prisoner.

“I ask myself sometimes what positive results came out of my three and a half years of captivity. It is difficult to think of much, but principally I think of the comradeship and support of one’s fellows. This was quite universal and not at all dependent on rank. There was suffering amongst our number at all times and one felt deeply for those in need of help, and such help as was available, mostly moral rather than practical, was freely given and received.”

My uncle survived imprisonment and was asked to help at a transit camp for ex-prisoners.. He was flown there, and the pilot diverted to take photographs of a city called Nagasaki destroyed by a new type of weapon. Despite all his privation and suffering he said in his talk:

“I see from the notebook I kept at the time, that I expressed great concern about the morality of dropping the atomic bombs and the great suffering inflicted...”

Like many he came to change his mind on reflecting on the greater casualties that might have followed with a conventional invasion, but all a reflection of the terrible and hard consequences of total war.

We should remember because we need to say that it is straightforwardly wrong and evil to treat human beings in the way so many captives were treated. It is right that profound apologies, such as that recently made by the Mitsubishi Corporation should be made.

We remember, because false ideologies stalk our world today and those too need to be stood up to, and denounced for what they are because of the suffering they inflict, such suffering as is being remembered today.

We should remember because of the terrible destructive power that lies in human hands.

We remember because the Christian Gospel calls us to a better vision as we follow Jesus Christ.

In Jesus God calls us not to be content with the sins and failures of this world. As Christ suffers for us and brings us the astonishing hope of new life in resurrection, he calls us to work with him for his Kingdom, for the hope of heaven that breaks into our world now, and never to be complacent in the face of human folly and sin.

We could just be overwhelmed with sadness, or despair - but those we remember today call us to something far better, and Christ, as we are reminded in that wonderful passage of hope from St Paul, never abandons those whom he loves so much that he came to this fallen world to die and rise again.

“For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

7 min read

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