

Dear Friends,

The risen Jesus still bears the wounds of the cross. We see that when Jesus invites Thomas to touch him where the nails pierced his hands and the spear his side. Although Jesus is risen, we may not forget the cross. Maybe when all things are made new death will finally be swallowed up in victory. Until then our calling is to be aware of the countless crucifixions that people endure and be their partners as they struggle to set themselves free from their crosses.

The suffering caused by the coronavirus is at the front of our minds. But it is right this week also to remember another virus that brought terrible destruction to Europe. The 15th April 2020 is the seventy fifth anniversary of the liberation of the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp. In the BBC archive you can hear Richard Dimbleby's report on what he found there soon after the British troops arrived. His dispatch is so horrific that at first the BBC refused to air it. They did not believe that what he described could be true. But they changed their minds when he threatened to resign. He was determined that people should have the opportunity to know the truth.

Tens of thousands of people died at Belsen. Behind the statistics are the stories. Richard Dimbleby tells one that was shared with him. On the night that Belsen was liberated a mother who was carrying her baby wrapped in rags begged a British soldier for milk to feed her child. She was so emaciated that she could not produce any. She then thrust the baby into his arms while she ran off to find some. The soldier held the child while the woman went on her desperate search. He parted the bundle in which the baby was wrapped and saw that the child was already dead and had clearly been dead for days.

Where in these circumstances is the resurrection? You wonder if there was any light at all shining in this darkness. Yet, even here Richard Dimbleby was able to see signs of hope. He saw people who had not lost their humanity. They were desperate for their own survival but could still show generosity and make sacrifices for others. He described four young people who found a scrap of food and shared it. He also told of the five hundred or so children between the ages of five and twelve who were not so hungry as the others because the women had gone without in order to keep them alive.

Prejudice is a virus that causes horrific destruction. But there is a vaccine. It is being open to people in their variety and taking time to make friends and build relationships.

God bless you,

Tony