

BISHOP OF PORTSMOUTH'S HOMILY

D-DAY SERVICE, Portsmouth Cathedral, 9th June 2014

Bishop: On 1st June 1944, just days before D-Day, Arland Scott, a 26 year old soldier with the Royal Canadian Artillery wrote to his young wife and to his young baby daughter whom he had only briefly seen once on leave following her birth in May. Arland was fatally wounded on the Normandy beaches and died on 8th June.

This letter has been with Arland's family these past 70 years. Now his daughter Joan will read his final letter....

A Letter from Portsmouth – June 1st 1944. My Darling Wife and Baby - This is just a short note to say that I am still OK here. I haven't had a letter from you for some time now. But I know that mail has been held up this last week. I won't get any for a while now. I only wish I had got the pictures of my daughter. But I guess they will follow.

The weather here is fine, it is not so hot now as it was a few days ago but it is plenty warm enough yet.

Darling if you saw me now you would hardly know me. I have all my hair cut off. It sure feels funny with nothing to comb.

I sure miss you a lot my darling lover I miss my baby to. I know you will look after her just the way I want you to so I don't worry about that. I just miss being with you and loving you like we always used to while we lived here. But just wait darling this old war can't last forever. We will make up for all this when we get to find our home. I haven't had mail from home for a long time now I guess it is my fault for not writing often enough.

Well darling I must get along. I have a lot of things to do this afternoon. Always remember I love you more than anything in this world. My thoughts and prayers are with you always. My only one darling sweetheart wife and lover. Give my daughter a kiss from her loving daddy and all my love and kisses to you darling. God bless you both for me.

Always your devoted loyal and loving husband.

Bishop: That moving letter touches us all. Tender love and the anxiety of prolonged silence deepened, more than most of us know, by the uncertainties and hardships of war, at home and away. And the emotional cost of the war lives on. It lives in the still-vivid memories of those who've experienced war first hand, witnesses to horrors no human being should endure.

It lived in those waiting at home, helpless to protect those they love, unsure whether their babe in arms will ever meet its father. But, invisibly, it lives also in those of us who are too young to remember the war, or who were perhaps not even born.

I was struck recently by some reflections from a trauma centre in South Africa that works with survivors of torture and their families. There, staff have realised just how deeply the children of people who've experienced terrible suffering, sense and even live out the disturbing emotions of their parents – feelings of anger, and helplessness and fear; feelings of over-protectiveness, and longing. Without any first hand

knowledge of what happened, such is their immersion in the emotional landscape of their parents, that they share in its cost.

Just so for us, as those who experienced first hand the events of the 1940s at first hand gradually become fewer, the memory lives on. We, the children and the grandchildren, know the love and the cost in our bones. And so, from our hearts and with all our being, we remember those events; we honour those people. And we offer our love, our prayers, our music, our gifts, our lives, as we seek to build on the peace for which our parents and grandparents gave so deeply. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness. And Blessed are the peacemakers.

The choir sings

Do not stand at my grave and weep,
I am not there - I do not sleep.
I am the thousand winds that blow,
I am the diamond glints in snow,
I am the sunlight on ripened grain,
I am the gentle autumn rain.
As you awake with morning's hush
I am the swift-up-flinging rush
Of quiet birds in circling flight.
Do not stand at my grave and cry,
I am not there - I did not
die.

Words: M E Frye

Bishop: On January 6, 1941 President Roosevelt, even in the midst of World War, set out his vision of Four Freedoms – a possible way to ensure peace and freedom in the world after conflicts had ended. In a moment Bishop Christopher will reflect on these but first we hear the text read by one of our Head Choristers Oliver Nash, whose father is Commanding Officer of HMS Defender, currently on deployment with the Royal Navy.

Reading: The Four Freedoms Roosevelt

In the future days, which we seek to make secure, we look forward to a world founded upon four essential human freedoms.

The first is freedom of speech and expression—everywhere in the world.

The second is freedom of every person to worship God in his own way—everywhere in the world.

The third is freedom from want—which, translated into world terms, means economic understandings which will secure to every nation a healthy peacetime life for its inhabitants—everywhere in the world.

The fourth is freedom from fear—which, translated into world terms, means a world-wide reduction of armaments to such a point and in such a thorough fashion that no nation will be in a position to commit an act of physical aggression against any neighbour—anywhere in the world.

That is no vision of a distant millennium. It is a definite basis for a kind of world attainable in our own time and generation. That kind of world is the very antithesis of

the so-called new order of tyranny which the dictators seek to create with the crash of a bomb.

Bishop: Two weeks ago, Europe elected its parliament. It wasn't long after D-Day that the grand European project began, and now just shy of 70 years later, low election turnouts and increasing euro-scepticism suggest that some people may be beginning to lose faith. In tough economic times, the bureaucracy, the legal complexities and the challenges of the Euro no doubt contribute to the understandable malaise.

But there's something else too. As slick modern buildings rise up in place of the scars of war rubble, and as national concerns preoccupy us all, a sort of forgetting is beginning to happen. Of course, where there has been such suffering, forgetting is healthy and good. It's a sign that hurts are beginning to heal, that painful memories are beginning to ease, that nations once again feel confident and at peace.

But, whatever our views about the EU and current political realities, some things must never be forgotten. With the words "never again" on their lips the pursuit of those freedoms which Roosevelt summarised became a cause to live for. Freedom of speech, freedom to worship, freedom from want and from fear calls us into a courageous fight for what is attainable for all. Our battleground is ethical, religious and political - and infinitely preferable to the alternative, and if we think the alternative could never happen again, we kid ourselves.

Whatever our political persuasion, however we engage, the words "never again" must remain on all our lips, as loud and defiant as 70 years ago. 'Go forth' begins the Blessing I and others have used this week as we have remembered. 'Go forth into the world in peace, be of good courage.' It's an important and urgent impetus for us. Never again will we settle our disputes through violent means; never again will we subject one another to such suffering, if we show the courage today we honour in those who gave on D Day.