

Hiroshima

Tomorrow will be the seventy-first anniversary of the dropping of the atomic bomb on the Japanese city of Hiroshima on the sixth of August 1945. The bomb, known ironically as "Little Boy", devastated an area of five square miles. More than sixty percent of the buildings in the city were destroyed. It is estimated that the final death toll was about 140,000, out of the city's population of 350,000, including those who died later from radiation. Many others suffered long-term sickness and disability, not to mention the psychological trauma of that event. Three days later a second bomb was dropped on the city of Nagasaki, where nearly 74,000 people were killed and a similar number injured.

We have probably all seen the images of the devastation following the bombing. In particular there is that iconic image of the total wasteland with only the ruins of the observatory still standing. We may have heard testimonies of those who were there but we cannot really imagine what it was like to experience such a terrible event.

Whether the unleashing of atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki was justified or not has been a matter of great debate ever since. Certainly it had the intended effect of forcing the Japanese to surrender and resulted in the end of the war in the east. Some would not have survived if hostilities had continued. And there are similar arguments about the allied bombing of German cities such as Dresden.

Whatever our views on this the fact of the terrible loss of human life is inescapable. And the suffering of those who survived is equally contrary to any norms of human decency.

If the destruction of those two cities was just a one-off that would be bad enough. But every day we hear of the bombing of cities like Aleppo in Syria where hospitals are targeted and where the victims are often children and the elderly. Again this is something beyond our comprehension.

Will it ever end, we may well ask ourselves. Ultimately only a political solution in Syria, Iraq and elsewhere can producing lasting peace, but is the will to achieve that there? Will those who know only violence and terror as a way of pursuing their aims be willing to work for peace and reconciliation? We can only hope and pray.

Our Bible reading (Isaiah 51.1-6) reflects the suffering of the people of Israel caused by the Assyrians and the Babylonians. More than once in its history Jerusalem was destroyed and its inhabitants killed or exiled. But the prophet looks forward to the restoration of the city and of the people of Israel.

The keywords are salvation, deliverance, hope. And that is the message for our world today too. We believe that ultimately oppression will give way to justice, violence to peace, hatred to respect, fear to true humanity. And we hope that because we believe in God - God who is righteous, just and loving.

*5 August 2016
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