‘Give peace in our time O Lord.’

This week we have been celebrating the 75th anniversary of victory in Europe Day. I was 4 when the war started and my earliest memory when about 6, was attending church with my parents and, having been in Belfast during a few blitz, I was convinced that this plea, ‘Give peace in our time O Lord,’ was meant to end the war before we were all killed.

Some four years later, in May 1945 there were indications that war was coming to an end. Rumours that Hitler was dead and that the allied armies were closing in on Berlin. Then one afternoon, (possibly 8th) as we came out of school a young man shouted to us ‘The war is over.’

**‘Wow! Peace in our time.’** The prayer answered.

Oh, the innocence of a youngster. Over the succeeding 75 years I have witnessed incidents of strife and learned that ‘war’ is not the only way our peace can be attacked – natural and man-made disasters together with all manner of life-threatening diseases to mention but a few.

Obviously, our current situation is foremost in our minds. There are some similarities between the war years and now. Travel restrictions (‘is your journey really necessary), Stay at home (there was entertainment to encourage holidays at home) and of course the numerous tragic deaths. We all know how death can disrupt family life, but it impacts us so much more when we hear large numbers being reported out each day. Where is peace in our time?

The Old Testament reading from Zechariah follows one of Israel’s defeats. The Babylonian army under Nebuchadnezzar had routed the Jews. Solomon’s Temple was destroyed and many citizens were exiled to Babylon. Many years later, at the collapse of the Babylonian empire, these exiles returned to Jerusalem with the intention of building a new Temple. Zechariah was encouraging them to complete the building with the assurance God that would protect the workers and empower them by His Holy Spirit. They were just ordinary people and didn’t feel they could even attempt such a task. Many people believe that to survive in this world a person must be strong and unbending but God says, ‘Not by might and power, but by my Spirit.’

One commentator suggests that many of the older Jews were disheartened because they realised the new temple did not match the splendour of the destroyed Solomon’s temple.

Nothing has changed. We older people have a mantra ‘It was not like that in our youth.’ We see the present as a poorer version of our past. Of course, the world evolves and each generation has a ‘norm.’ Even the church has changed – the joy of female priests (and Bishops), the Book of Common Prayer, giving way in part to the alternative Common Worship. Perhaps we feel that sense of loss, even of missed opportunity.

But one thing has not changed – the constancy of our God. In our reading from Revelation we are given a glimpse of the New Jerusalem, where God lives among his people forever. We have the great promise: ‘God will wipe away every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain for the old order of things has passed away.’ Do not let your past or the present dim your hope for the future and your confidence in God.

As we prepare for our time of prayer, please forgive an old man’s love of the Book of Common Prayer, ‘Give peace in our time, O Lord. Because there is none other than fighteth for us, but only thou O God.’ Amen.