

Some years ago, I enjoyed a family holiday in Paris, in an area known as Le Marais. It is a quaint and historic area which traditionally had many Jewish residents. Indeed, one day, whilst eating at a restaurant in the company of our Canadian nephew who just happened to be in Paris at the time, we struck up a conversation with a lady who lived in Israel and who had many family ties to Le Marais. Whilst in Paris, on our wanderings, we came across a wall on which there were named Parisians who had helped Jews during the holocaust. Their names are honoured for their compassion and courage.

After our visit we watched the film, *Sarah's Key*, which was set in Le Marais, a generation after the Second World War. It was a particularly harrowing depiction of one family's experience during the Nazi occupation and the tragic effect on the girl who survived and escaped to America but was so traumatised she could not live with the emotional pain. The film brings home the cruelty of the holocaust as it was manifested in Paris, which after all is hardly the other side of the world. This month, the Imperial War Museum in London has opened at a cost of over £30 million, a new permanent gallery featuring the Second World War and the Shoah (Holocaust). I hope to visit it.

During my previous appointment Hilary and I were privileged to attend a special celebration of the Free Methodist Church in Rwanda. The visits to several memorials to the victims of the Rwandan genocide have left an indelible impression on me. Between April and June 1994, in a 100-day period, a million lives were very cruelly lost. *Hotel Rwanda* is one of several films that depict part of that story.

The autumn is a period of remembrance as well as a season of mellow fruitfulness. Real remembrance is not to be rushed and requires preparation of mind and heart. It is not about ghoulish curiosity, but human compassion and a commitment and desire to work for peace and the relief of suffering. Despite the fragmentation of society and the hostility between nations, humanity can and should unite in common cause to avoid the endless repetition of yesterday's mistakes.

'A story told is not forgotten'. Remembrance is at the heart of our faith. The central act of Christian worship revolves around the command of Jesus, '*Do this in remembrance of me*'. Something about the act of remembrance brings the past into the present to influence our future. Mysteriously, the grace of God was revealed alongside the cruelty of the crucifixion, and often the human spirit has risen to new heights when encountering unspeakable wickedness. This too is a mystery.

John Wesley taught his Methodists, 'Do no harm', which remains a good ethic for today. If practised it would 'make man's inhumanity to man' a thing of the past.

God bless you,

Keith

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