

Dear Friends,

8th May was a special day in the calendar. The 75th anniversary of VE Day. We were not able to hold parades or gather to commemorate this. But this takes nothing away from the significance of the anniversary of that turning point in history.

I was very moved by the speech made by Germany's Federal President, Frank-Walter Steinmweier. Below, I have added the link for his speech if you wish to see the full context. My newspaper quoted one of his remarks in a way that triggered a whole train of thought for me. As I understood the article, it quoted him as saying that remembrance never ends, and that there could be no "*redemption*" from Germany's past. As the concept of redemption is very central to my own deeply held beliefs, I found this challenging. The stark concept that for some individuals, or even nations, there could be no redemption is a very bleak one indeed.

Recently many churches have been reading from the first letter of Peter, which speaks among other things, of faith and hope in tough times. I have been reading a commentary by the respected scholar, I. Howard Marshall. Arising from St. Peter's words, Howard Marshall discusses Christian hope and its relationship to faith and salvation. All three ideas (faith, hope and salvation) represent a future inheritance but they also change our present experience and alter our perception of today's reality. Crucially, they empower us in our quest to become better people.

Reading the account in my newspaper of the Federal President's speech gave me some concern. I figured that a nation that does not believe that redemption is possible, is offered scant motivation to make penance, or to nurture our common humanity by acts of charity and grace. Without hope of redemption we are left in a quagmire of guilt with no holy aspirations to spur us on to a better life.

Not having studied the German language, I looked up the full text of the speech in an English translation. Here, the key word is translated "*deliverance*" and not "*redemption*". To what extent, I wonder, does this change the nuance of what is being said? And how do we relate the underlying philosophy to our own experience and the situation of people in our society who have made mistakes, acknowledged their wrongdoing, served their sentence and wish to be rehabilitated?

I was very moved when I visited Rwanda some time ago, at the work towards peace and reconciliation that I witnessed there. The people I met did not seek to blot out the horrid truth of the past genocide but were working to bring the nation together as one. I met with community leaders who acknowledged the hurts and tragedies of the past, whilst encouraging a vision of a shared future, in which the different groups could find a common identity.

Seeing the Federal Presidents' remarks in full puts them in a rather different light. I believe that what he was saying was actually not so far from what I believe. He said, "*without remembrance we lose our future*". It is a truism to say that if we forget the mistakes of the past, we are doomed to repeat them. A nation, or an individual that genuinely grieves for

the errors of the past is, I believe, on a path that can lead to redemption. However, it remains my belief that the hope of redemption and a better future is a powerful force that motivates us to improve the present day, because “*liberation*” is never complete, and it is not something that we can just experience passively. It challenges us actively, every day anew.” This is true of historical liberation and our spiritual liberation from the power of sin.

The Psalm attributed to King David, and thought to have been written after he had seriously blotted his copy book, tells us: *The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise.*(Psalm 51:7). Rabbi Nachman is quoted by the Federal President as saying, “*No heart is as whole as a broken heart.*” Surely, it is true that a nation or individual whose heart is splintered by the awareness of their past guilt is more loveable than one that is arrogant or self-righteous.

What better conclusion to these thoughts following V E Day, than to recall St Peter’s words:

“Finally, all of you, live in harmony with one another; be sympathetic, love as brothers, be compassionate and humble. Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult, but with blessing... seek peace and pursue it.” (1 Peter 3: 8,9a, 11b.)

God bless you,

Keith.

Rev. Keith C. Beckingham, Superintendent Minister.

Federal President Frank-Walter Steinmeier’s speech can be found at

<https://www.dw.com/en/german-president-marks-lonely-world-war-ii-75th-anniversary/a-53368453>