

Sermon: Terrorist bombings - Service of remembrance and solidarity

God promises us peace; and in that passage from St. Paul's letter to the Christians in the city of Philippi Paul exhorts his brothers and sisters to rejoice because of that.

Peace and rejoicing may not be uppermost in your minds this afternoon. After all we have come to mark death and evil. Surely there is no peace here and not much to rejoice about.

Well of course St. Paul didn't say that in this world everything would be OK, and that our lives would always be calm and peaceful and gentle. In fact, if anything, Jesus taught quite the opposite. He said that in this world we would have trouble and he told his followers that they would have to take up a cross if they wanted to follow him.

The thing is of course that, in Christian understanding this world, though created perfect by God, is a fallen world. That is to say it is a world in which we human beings constantly seem to fall short of the loving and joyful and peaceful and hopeful way marked out for us by God who created us.

Christians believe that when we look at Jesus on the cross we are looking into the face of that fallenness; that brokenness of humanity; we are looking into the face of the sin of the world. We believe that that act of crucifixion represents all the rejection of God in the lives of human beings.

But, we also believe that Jesus rose from death; that he overcame death and therefore that he overcame that evil and that rejection and that's why Paul calls on his readers to rejoice and that's why he told them of God's peace.

Now, of course, in the world as it is that peace is not fully realised; there are still those who reject the way of God and so there are still events which force us to look into the face of evil. On 7 July we saw such an event and it horrified us all; those bombings were specifically designed to mete out death and grief and mutilation. All human beings are, we believe, made in the image of God and the terrorist bombings disfigured that image.

They are not the only acts to have disfigured the image of God in human beings. Jesus called his followers to repentance and so for Christians all such acts of evil must lead us all to look at ourselves and to repent of the ways in which we have disfigured the image of God in ourselves or others.

But today, one month on, we recall one particular act; and so we once again look into the face of evil.

As we do so we remember with thanksgiving the lives of those who died. Few of us in Bromley have personal connections but some of us very definitely do, this is not something far away. For some of our neighbours it is very personal and today we stand with them in remembering and honouring their loved ones. Our hearts go out too to the people who have been crippled or disfigured by the bombings and those who will bear psychological scars, probably for the rest of their lives. Let us recall too those who support and care for the bereaved and injured. In a short while we shall do that in our prayers.