

Remembrance 2021

Both the OT prophet Isaiah and the Apostle John who was of course a disciple of Jesus, have a vision of a future that is very different to the experience of the world in just about any age.

The fulness of God's Kingdom is imagined as a mountain, greater than any other and all nations will come to it. They will live within the laws, precepts and statutes of God's Grace and there will no longer be any conflicts. Swords become plowshares, peace reigns and all peoples walk in the light of the Lord.

Then hundred of years later John's vision is of a new heaven and earth and God himself dwells with the people. Those words of hope we read so often at funerals – in God's Kingdom, there is no more mourning or crying or pain. The one who is the beginning and the end will establish his Kingdom.

But we don't live in a kingdom like that – not as they describe it.

A quick internet check last week on the website World Population review tells me there are currently conflicts in
Afghanistan
Ethiopia – civil war
Mexico – drug wars (350,000 deaths and 72,000 missing)
Yemen – civil way 20,00 deaths in 2020

And there are on-going conflicts measured as casualties between 1,000 and 10,000 in Algeria, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Chad, Colombia, Democratic republic of Congo. Iraq, Libya, Mali, Mozambique, Myanmar, Niger, Nigeria, Somalia, South Sudan, Syria, Tanzania, Tunisia

We are not living in God's Kingdom and yet it can still be present.

Jesus was asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, Jesus replied, "The coming of the kingdom of God is not something that can be observed,²¹ nor will people say, 'Here it is,' or 'There it is,' because the kingdom of God is in your midst."

So rather than waiting for the day when God will establish his kingdom everywhere for eternity, we work together to see his kingdom here and now in this place, in our lives as a sign of what will one day be.

Today I want to speak about someone who lived the principle of God's kingdom through the horror of the last war, but before I do we are going to sing again and have our third reading

We sing **All my hope on God is founded.**

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There are many people who live their lives working to create God's Kingdom of peace, love, faith and joy and one such person was a Dutch lady called Cornelia ten Boom – Corrie ten Boom.

She was a remarkable lady before the shadow of war fell across Holland. She was born on the 15th April 1892 in Amsterdam Holland, she was well educated and brought up in the Dutch Reformed church.

She studied at bible school for two years, she also studied to be a watchmaker like her Father Casper and in 1922 was the first women watchmaker to be licensed in Holland.

Their shop – which is still there as a jewellers shop, is in Harlaam and the shop and the house behind and above it was a quirky old place which comes into her story later.

Before the war the ten Boom family expressed their Christian Faith in practical ways. They often took in orphaned children, in 1922 Corrie a girls club (a bit like brownies and guides) once a month she ran a church service for children who were physically disabled and those with learning difficulties and by 1930 her girls club organisation had become very large,

In 1940 the war was underway and the Germans invaded Holland and overran the country in just 5 days. One of the things that happened was that the girls club organisation was banned.

Life in occupation began to get very difficult with rationing and all movement was restricted and in particular on the Jewish community. They had to wear yellow stars on the coats to identify themselves, businesses were closed, many were taken away, treatment was increasingly brutal.

The ten Boom family, that's Casper the father, his daughters Corrie and Betsie responded the only way they knew how. They opened

their home to the hungry, those who needed to hide, those who had to escape. By accident they found themselves connected to the Dutch Underground – that means the secret resistance to the occupation – and helped many people escape to the country and safety.

1942 a well-dressed woman came to the Ten Boom door with a suitcase in hand. She told the Ten Booms that she was a Jew and that her husband had been arrested several months before, and her son had gone into hiding. Occupation authorities had recently visited her, and she was too fearful to return home. After hearing about how the Ten Booms had helped their Jewish neighbours, she asked if she might stay with them, and Casper readily agreed.

Slide 38 - Casper

Casper ten Boom believed Jews were indeed "God's chosen people," and told the woman, "In this household, God's people are always welcome."

And so it started. The ten boom house became "The Hiding Place" and at any one time there were between 6 and 8 people hiding in that house. But there was a problem. Food was rationed and very scarce. It's hard to feed 10 people on the food allocated to 4 people. But Corrie knew a man who worked in the local ration office. His daughter used to come to the church services she held for disabled people.

Slide 39 – ration cards

She went to his house unannounced one evening, and he seemed to know why. When he asked how many ration cards she needed, "I opened my mouth to say, 'Five,'" Corrie wrote in her book *The Hiding Place*. "But the number that unexpectedly and astonishingly came out instead was: 'One hundred.'"

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Over a period of time, the Ten Boom family and a network of others managed to hide and smuggle about 800 people – students, underground members and Jews - out to safety.

It was while they were hiding people in their house, that they were encouraged to make a secret room in which people could hide if the house was ever raided.

Slide 40 – secret room

It was a very strange old house, with twisting stairs and odd shaped rooms and so they built this thin small hiding place in Corrie's bedroom.

To get into it – you crawled through her wardrobe on your hands and knees. The room was 30 inches wide – that's 75 cm and you can see a picture here because the house is now a museum. In this picture they've knocked a hole in the wall so you can see how it was made.

Slide 41 – secret room

They installed an electric buzzer with a switch near the door downstairs and Corrie's bedroom was at the very top of the house, so if the house was raided, the people hiding had a just a few seconds to grab their things and hide in the secret room.

On February 28, 1944, the family was betrayed and the Gestapo (the Nazi secret police) raided their home. The Gestapo set a trap and waited throughout the day, seizing everyone who came to the house. By evening about 30 people had been taken into custody! Casper, Corrie and Betsie were all arrested. Corrie's brother Willem, sister Nollie, and nephew Peter were at the house that day, and were also taken to prison.

Although the Gestapo systematically searched the house, they couldn't find anyone. They suspected Jews were in the house, but the Jews were safely hidden behind a false wall in Corrie's bedroom. In this "hiding place" were two Jewish men, two Jewish women and two members of the Dutch underground. Although the house remained under guard, the Resistance was able to liberate the refugees 47 hours later. The six people had managed to stay quiet in their cramped, dark hiding place for all that time, even though they had no water and very little food.

Because extra ration cards were found in their home, the Ten Boom family was imprisoned. Casper died after only 10 days in Prison, he was 84 years old.

Slide 42 - Casper

When Casper was asked if he knew he could die for helping Jews, he replied, "It would be an honour to give my life for God's ancient people."

¹⁶ This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters.

It's highly unlikely we will give our lives as Casper did for others, but we can live our lives in the service of others and by so doing, see glimpses and signs of God's kingdom. It's right here, right now. Not in all the fulness that it will one day be, but in the acts of generosity, kindness and service to others – not least in all we have seen through the pandemic.

The organisation we support today the RBL was founded 100 years ago. On their website it says this.

For 100 years the Royal British Legion has been helping serving and ex-serving personnel and their families.

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From those who served in the First World War to the men and women of our Armed Forces today, we believe no-one should suffer for having served others.

As we reflect on our achievements over the last 100 years, we stand ready to support the next generation when they need us.

Corrie and Betsie spent 10 months in three different prisons, the last was the infamous Ravensbrück Concentration Camp located near Berlin, Germany.

"There is no pit so deep that God's love is not deeper still" and "God will give us the love to be able to forgive our enemies."

At age 53, Corrie began a world-wide ministry which took her into more than 60 countries in the next 33 years! She testified to God's love and encouraged all she met with the message that "Jesus is Victor."

"It was at a church service in Munich that I saw him, the former SS man who had stood guard at the shower room door in the processing centre at Ravensbrück. He was the first of our actual jailers that I had seen since that time. And suddenly it was all there – the roomful of mocking men, the heaps of clothing, Betsie's pain blanched face.

He came up to me as the church was emptying, beaming and bowing. "How grateful I am for your message Fräulein", he said "To think that, as you say, Jesus has washed my sins away!" His hand was thrust out to shake mine. And I, who had preached so often the need to forgive, kept my hand at my side.

Even as the angry, vengeful thoughts boiled through me, I saw the sin of them. Jesus Christ had died for this man; was I going to ask for more? Lord Jesus, I prayed, forgive me and help me to forgive him. I tried to smile; I struggled to raise my hand. I could not. I felt nothing, not the slightest spark of warmth or

charity. And so again I breathed a silent prayer. Jesus, I cannot forgive him. Give me Your Forgiveness.

As I took his hand the most incredible thing happened. From my shoulder along my arm and through my hand a current seemed to pass from me to him, while into my heart sprang a love for this stranger that almost overwhelmed me.

And so I discovered that it is not on our forgiveness any more than on our goodness that the world's healing hinges, but on His. When Jesus tells us to love our enemies, He gives, along with the command, the love itself."

The capacity to forgive...the desire to love and serve, they can only be sustained by the grace of God given to us, so as we sing a hymn now, I wonder if the words might be a prayer.

For the healing of the nations,
Lord, we pray with one accord;
for a just and equal sharing
of the things that earth affords.
To a life of love in action
help us rise and pledge our word.

Revd. Jon Hutchinson, 14 November 2021