



**THOUGHTS FOR SUNDAY EVENING  
EASTER 5  
10 MAY 2020**

*VE Day*  
Acts 7:55-end

I remember hearing on the wireless a few years ago a lady recounting the occasion of VE Day, 75 years ago, when she was sitting by the hospital bed of her dying father. Whilst all the world outside the window was going wild with rejoicing she was contemplating the death of her much loved father. He did die whilst she was there and she had to face the lonely journey home, in her distress, through the milling crowds expressing sentiments so very different from her own feelings.

I also remember our celebrations here in Darley Abbey to mark the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of VE Day. Some of us from S. Matthew's performed a wireless sketch from the *ITMA* series of wartime broadcasts on the then new stage of the extended Village Hall. It was a happy occasion, but clouded at the end for me when one of the ladies who had attended was very fearful that she, suffering from dementia as she was, would not be able to find her way home. Of course she had come with some friends who were on hand to take her home, but for that brief moment I saw into her darker world that was existing in parallel with the sunlight of mine.

In today's lesson from the Acts of the Apostles we have the story of the stoning of Stephen, the first Christian martyr. Stephen, convinced of the truths of the gospel and 'filled with the Holy Spirit' testifies before the high priest and the council – those who have absolute power over his life – that he can 'see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God!' This is just what they don't want to hear, and Stephen's fate is sealed – they rush to the stoning – and we are told that Saul, who was to become S. Paul, stood by holding the coats of the stoners which they had removed, presumably, so that they could take better aim. This is the darkest possible picture for Stephen, everyone is against him, but he dies, not with the curse on his lips, against his attackers, or against God, who had done nothing to save him, that I think would have been my first thought, but with the prayer that the Lord should not hold this sin against them. In this way Stephen shews how profound upon him has been the understanding of the things of God that have been revealed to him. Even in his last extremity he casts himself upon God, assured of his reception.

As we give thanks at this VE Day season for the stability that that victory has brought to our country over the past 75 years, we cannot forget the troubled times through which we are now living, and we must surely regret that we have not been able to build the peaceful, sunlit world everywhere that was so much the hope of those celebrating 75 years ago. But the example of Stephen still stands before us, of calm faith that knows that our destiny is glory. Let us pray that the current crisis will bring humanity to make a new attempt to build a better world, and that we, who have the faith of Stephen, will play our part.

Clive Lemmon