

Introduction

Urban legend has it that the great Jewish violinist, Itzhak Perlman, was once performing to a packed theatre on Broadway, when one of his strings unexpectedly snapped with an audible twang. The audience held its breath, expecting the end of the performance or, at the very least, a break whilst a new instrument would be found. But, Perlman didn't bat an eyelid. He proceeded to do the impossible – to play the rest of the concerto almost flawlessly on three strings. In explaining the extraordinary feat after the performance, he is said to have remarked: 'sometimes in life, you have to make music with what is left.'

27 January marks the liberation of Auschwitz-Birkenau, the largest Nazi death camp. In 2020 we will commemorate the 75th anniversary. The seeds for the Holocaust lay in the history of anti-Semitism, a strand of which has long been perpetuated in the Christian Church. For instance, in his book, *On the Jews and Their Lies*, Martin Luther encourages Christians to set the Jews' synagogues and schools on fire, raise and destroy their houses, and take their prayer books and Talmudic writings. Such sentiments often were quoted and circulated in Nazi Germany as rationale for the Holocaust. Indeed, the Holocaust sprang from a predominantly Christian part of the world. Many who declared Jesus as "Lord and Saviour" were personally involved in the atrocities. In reflecting on this painful history, it is important for us to acknowledge that many of the same forces that allowed the Holocaust continue to exert themselves today – including in the Christian Church.

Rather than being defensive, we do well on this day of remembrance to humbly remember the prejudice and violence that our fellow Christians have perpetuated in God's name, and to prayerfully seek to apply lessons learned. To develop a faith that draws more deeply from Scripture and tradition in ways that nurture seeds of Christlike love, justice, and peace, particularly toward those marginalised and suffering in our world.

If we can use this day receive fresh inspiration in these ways, the memory of Holocaust victims will truly be honoured.

Prayers of Penitence

God spoke through the prophet Amos: Take away from me the noise of your songs; to the melody of your harps I will not listen. But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream. (*Amos 5:23,24*)

Silence is kept

For sins which we ourselves have committed and for sins of omission,
for sins of our hands and sins of our hearts, for the hurt we have caused you and our neighbours through ignorance or indifference... (*Pause briefly for silent reflection*)

O God of Abraham,
We ask your forgiveness for failure to see your image in someone who is different...

O God of Sarah,
We ask your forgiveness
For putting our own welfare and social comfort above the basic needs of others...

O God of Jacob,
We ask your forgiveness for our reluctance to get involved...

O God of Rachel,
We ask your forgiveness
For being grateful that we are in some way superior to another...

O God of Leah,
We ask your forgiveness for teaching that it is better to receive than to give...

O God of Sinai,
We ask your forgiveness
For the failure of your Church to be light in the darkness

O God of Calvary,
We ask your forgiveness.

A Prayer for Holocaust Memorial Day (Collect)

Loving God, we come to you with heavy hearts, remembering the six million Jewish souls murdered during the Holocaust.

In the horrors of that history, when so many groups were targeted because of their identity, and in genocides which followed, we recognise destructive prejudices that drive people apart.

Forgive us when we give space to fear, negativity and hatred of others, simply because they are different from us.

In the light of God, we see everyone as equally precious manifestations of the Divine, and can know the courage to face the darkness.

Through our prayers and actions, help us to stand together with those who are suffering, so that light may banish all darkness, love will prevail over hate and good will triumph over evil.

Amen

Reflection by The Most Revd and Rt Hon Justin Welby Archbishop of Canterbury

The theme of Holocaust Memorial Day 2020, *Stand Together*, is both a sobering reminder to us as Christians as well as an encouraging inspiration.

The opposite sense of “standing together” might be to “stand by”: to watch from a distance, doing nothing. It goes to the heart of Christian discipleship, what it means to be a good neighbour, that we figuratively cross the road.

Following Christ Jesus demands that we take action on behalf of someone else who is the object of hate or violence. When Jesus summarised God’s commandments into the twofold direction to ‘love God’ and ‘love your neighbour as yourself’, he was following a pattern of familiar rabbinical teaching. The biblical understanding of the sacredness of humanity, the image of God in each person, underpins this twofold challenge.

Essentially, you cannot love God and hate your neighbour, and you cannot love your neighbour without loving God. When Jesus’ concept of the neighbour includes people that may be ethnically or religiously “other”, even the enemy, then we indeed have our work cut out.

It is this very “standing together”, that we believe God has done in Christ. God in Christ does not merely watch the world from afar, but enters into our stuff, is alongside us, feels with us, and is even prepared to die for us. This is the reality of ‘God with us’. The solidarity that this year’s Holocaust Memorial Day theme calls us to is thoroughly of a piece with the Christian story. It is fitting, then, that this calling is situated within Christian prayer and worship. We need God’s help and the inspiration of the Holy Spirit to live lives worthy of the good news of Christ. Indeed, we need to approach this theme with genuine humility. If we are completely honest with ourselves, solidarity on behalf of the other, the stranger, whoever they may be, disturbs our comfort.

Thankfully, in the UK itself we are not currently expected to lose our lives for our faith, although we were in historic times, though many Christians around the world may face that choice daily.

But we are still called to be alongside the suffering, the objects of hate, and risk material gain, privilege, or reputation in the process.

Some of us are familiar with Thomas Cranmer's words of confession in the Book of Common Prayer where we are encouraged to repent before God, first of all, for having 'left undone those things which we ought to have done'. Standing by is a sin.

To stand with our neighbours will mean that as Christians we may be called to speak against hatred of other religions. This Christian solidarity will seek the best of those that we may otherwise disagree with on matters of doctrine and belief. In a country struggling with deep political divisions, it may require of us to model respectful speech for those whose politics are very different to ours. At a time of rising hate speech on social media, and of far-right extremism, it will mean challenging racism or language that vilifies the refugee or asylum seeker.

I am inspired by the story of Corrie Ten Boom, the Dutch Christian woman who hid Jews from the Nazis in occupied Netherlands and is an emblem for so many of this year's theme. She was sent to a concentration camp where her sister died. Through all that suffering, though, Corrie Ten Boom persisted in a message of truth and forgiveness, whatever the cost. At the same time, I am ashamed of the long history of Christian antisemitism, and those moments when, even to this day, Christians have failed to speak out and have just stood by while others have suffered.

The Holocaust, the Shoah, remains a unique stain on the history of Europe, and a chilling reminder to me of how millennia of Christian anti-Jewish hatred could provide a seedbed for such evil. Let us use this 75th anniversary to come before God in worship, conscious of our need for forgiveness, but committed to action that would seek the common flourishing of all.

THE ACTION IN THE GHETTO OF ROHATYN, MARCH 1942.

by Alexander Kimel- Holocaust Survivor.

Read by Ilse Perlmutter

Do I want to remember?

The peaceful ghetto, before the raid:
Children shaking like leaves in the wind.

Mothers searching for a piece of bread.
Shadows, on swollen legs, moving with fear.
No, I don't want to remember, but how can I forget?
Do I want to remember, the creation of hell?

The shouts of the Raiders, enjoying the hunt.
Cries of the wounded, begging for life.

Faces of mothers carved with pain.

Hiding Children, dripping with fear.

No, I don't want to remember, but how can I forget?

Do I want to remember, my fearful return?

Families vanished in the midst of the day.
The mass grave steaming with vapor of blood.

Mothers searching for children in vain.

The pain of the ghetto, cuts like a knife.

No, I don't want to remember, but how can I forget?

Do I want to remember, the wailing of the night?

The doors kicked ajar, ripped feathers floating the air.

The night scented with snow-melting blood.

While the compassionate moon, is showing the way.

For the faceless shadows, searching for kin.

No, I don't want to remember, but I cannot forget.

Do I want to remember this world upside down?

Where the departed are blessed with an instant death.

While the living condemned to a short wretched life,

And a long tortuous journey into unnamed place,

Converting Living Souls, into ashes and gas.

No. I Have to Remember and Never Let You Forget.

Theme from Schindler's List

John Williams