

Radio Talk on V-J Day, August 15, 1945 By Rev. Lee C. Moorehead for WOSU (Ohio State Radio station)

A recent graduate of Boston University School of Theology, Moorehead had taken the position of Director of the Wesley Foundation at Ohio State University and gave weekly addresses on the university radio station. He was 26 years old when he wrote and presented this response. The term VJ Day has been applied to two days on which the initial announcement of Japan's surrender was made - August 15, 1945, in Japan, and September 2, 1945, when the surrender document was signed, officially ending World War II. August 15 is the official VJ Day for the UK, while the official US commemoration is September 2. The name VJ Day had been selected by the Allies after they named VE Day for the victory in Europe (May 8, 1945)

Today is indeed a day of joyous celebration for untold millions. They say that in the streets last night people pranced merrily and shouted with newly found, full throated joy. Bands blared forth and banners waved in ecstasy. As by a sudden emancipation, all the pent up feelings of millions of people were free to sing again. And as the swelling chorus mounted to the heavens surely in the eyes of God it must have seemed as though many of the children of earth were behaving as children who greet the great out-of-doors of Springtime, rollicking to and fro, the blazing sun gleaming in their faces and driving away the frigid winds and the gloomy shadows of winter. The long, dark cold night of nearly six long years was over. Once again people can walk boldly in the city streets, breathing the pure, abundant, free air, and look defiantly, even wistfully into the overarching sky of blue, fully expecting to see, not screaming vultures of death, but the cheery songs of birds, the brisk whistling of the breezes, and the lazy, harmless clouds drifting across a sea of blue serenity. What a joy it must have been to take down the sandbags stacked before houses and shops and let in again the full light of day!

And can we imagine with what tired joy these celebrants dropped their weary bodies into their beds last night, not fearing what the darkness might bring, sleeping sweetly and deeply for the first time in years. Sleep could be beautiful for the people in China at the Far East last night, for the thought of the morrow was not that of dread and terror; rather it was the hope that out of the shambles of shattered buildings, smoking streets a new city could be built, better than the old. Yes, after long nights of terror and toilsome days of despair, the joy in many hearts yesterday was full and satisfying.

There is something wonderful about the human spirit which causes it to rejoice and be glad even when death and destruction have had their way. It is unnatural for the human spirit to be low and lifeless; it is natural that the soul of man spread its wings in thrilling flight and soar joyously into new horizons. Therefore, no one would begrudge the glad celebration of these millions of liberated souls who raised the cry of joy. Though actually millions of fellow beings are still clutched tightly in the cruel claws of war, no one would want to deny to these millions that gladness which has been bought at such a terrible price. Even here in America, where our shores are unscathed and our cities unmolested, there seemed to be justification for uninhibited expressions of gladness. But when this exultant wave has passed from our consciousness, and we peer over the rim of dusky horizons to see that the beast of war still stalks the earth, then, perhaps, our joy shall be sobered and our hearts in fuller realization shall be bowed to the earth in penitence.

Thus, it would seem appropriate that even in the midst of our thankful joy we turn with broken and contrite hearts to God. Morbidity will not do in these days, but unless we human beings are sane enough and honest enough to confess our own stupidity and folly, and then somehow profit from having realized our own horrible mistakes, there can be little hope that we can ever raise ourselves from the muck and mire into which we have fallen. Certainly, within the courts of human judgement, responsibility and guilt will have to be measured and assigned. It is to be expected that those adjudged to be guilty will repent and attempt to restore their faith and good will. But we must not let ourselves be deluded by thinking that we who are material and physical victors are without sin.

Long ago an English poet wrote these pungent words: (John Donne)

No man is an island entire of itself; every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main; if a clod be washed away by the sea, Europe is the less, as well as if a promontory were, as well as any manner of thy friends or of thine own were; any man's death diminishes me, because I am involved in mankind. And therefore never send to know for whom the bell tolls; it tolls for thee.

If it is true that we are all involved in mankind, then it is equally true that we share one another's sorrow and guilt. If we are involved in mankind, we may fight the evil that is in our neighbor, but that evil will always affect us and cause us grief simply because no man, and now no nation, is an "island, entire of itself." We may attempt to pluck that evil out, and after much blood and battle we may win through. We may rebuke our foe and discipline him with strict censure for having wrought desolation in the earth. But though we rebuke him and though we discipline him, even when we are right, his suffering in remorse and shame is ours too. It is hardly possible in this world to fight evil with evil without staining one's hands with the poison whose destruction was sought.

The other day I was talking with a young college graduate and we were speaking about the awful fact that many of our friends had had to shut off a part of their Christian conscience and learn to kill or be killed. I asked her if she could blame them for doing this, and she replied that she did not blame them, she blamed herself. Blamed herself for living in this kind of a world where she could not contribute enough to its good so that such a ghastly business would not be necessary. Well, it is that kind of feeling which teaches us that the tolling bells of gloom and guilt toll for all of us. And out of a feeling like that grows the belief that, even on V-J Day, every understanding heart will turn with true repentance, and with hearty faith to God.

It would seem to be almost impossible that any of us could turn away from the sight of this war and return unchanged to the same old type of living. It would seem wholly unfitting that any of us engage in a kind of riotous celebration which is oblivious to the civilization which is crushed and torn. It is unthinkable that any of us could be so callous as to live on into the future without an attitude changed and a heart more humble.

Surely the mothers and fathers of the world who have seen their sons pay the supreme sacrifice and who have known something of the stinging grief of war, will be people broken and contrite in spirit before God. There are too many sons whose life blood has been shed in crimson fields and whose bodies now rest in peace on foreign soil. When the magnitude of this world's worst war has been measured, can there be any of us who do not join the great company of human souls whose foremost, choking feeling is that of remorse and repentance. Yes, I think that those of us who really care will not hide those feelings which lie beneath the surface of momentary joy.

In this modern day we often poke fun at the religionist of old who insisted that a man could not be saved until he first repented of his sins. We had almost convinced ourselves that we stood in no need of repentance. But with the wails of sorrow, and the cries of hunger, and the screams of tortured man filling the earth, we can be convinced of nothing but that our civilization has failed. We knew better, for we were told by the prophets and Jesus and all of the wisemen of old. But we LET it fail, and now the ghosts of all our failures haunt and plague us.

But if the religionists of old were wise in their insistence on the necessity of repentance, they also saw clearly that true repentance is the first step toward regeneration. And so on these days of victory and further victory approaching, repentance is the first step toward the overcoming of our evils and the establishing of the kind of a world in which we want to live.

On March 28 of this year the *Christian Century* contained these opening lines:

No winter since time began has known more suffering than has the season which is now ending. No springtime has ever brought less hope. Throughout most of the habitable earth mothers cry like Rachel for their sons, and will not be comforted, for their sons are dead or reading the dusty way to death. Fathers blinded by tears sift the ruins of their homes to find the bodies of their children. Man's inhumanity to man has done its worst. It has mounted to the heavens, toward which eyes were once lifted for mercy, and swept the world with fire and destruction. But when man has done his worst, he must still reckon with God. Once before we did our worst. On Calvary we crucified Jesus Christ. Then God did his best. On Easter he raised Christ from the dead, to become the first fruits of them that slept.

And with those words we can see that the God of this universe has not left us alone in our desolation. We have done our worst. God will do his best. But I feel quite sure that God will do his best only when we human children confess before him the awful shame of our misdoings. For when we lay our hearts bare before the Almighty, we have then placed ourselves in the hands of the great potter who can take up the broken fragments and mold life into a new pattern. We shall fail if we try to mold our new world out of the patterns of the old. Now, in our poverty only the Sovereign God of the Universe can bring forth a new world that is worth living in, because his patterns are forever new, and only he can breathe his life into them. And our God, our help in ages past, our hope in years to come, can help us only when we show him that we are ready. Therefore in the midst of these smoking ruins let us have our celebration; let us thrill to the realization that is finish, but let us sense beneath it all the terrible price we have paid, and let us resolve before Almighty God that we shall strive to bind up the wounds of our world, feed the hungry, go to them who are sick, release those who are in prison, care for the lame and the halt and the blind, and never let ourselves rest until we have ushered in a brighter day for men of earth. Then perhaps on a clear and peaceful night in years to come the silent stars in heaven above can look down upon earth with smiling eyes and see not destruction but order, not ugly snarling hatred, but beauty and the light of love in men's eyes. God will then have done his best; but perhaps, too, man will have given his.

Let us pray:

Our Father God, in the quiet beauty of this new dawn, we lift our hearts to Thee with a fervent prayer that Thou wilt visit with Thy mercy all of those places of earth laid waste by war. In this radiant morning may Thy tree of life spread its branches abroad, embracing all of the men of earth, and may its leaves now blooming be for the healing of the nations. All of this we ask in humility and repentance.

Amen