

TUESDAY APRIL 6

Colossians 2:6-15 – living in the in-between times

- 6** So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in him,
7 rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness.
8 See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the basic principles of this world rather than on Christ.
9 For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form,
10 and you have been given fullness in Christ, who is the head over every power and authority.
11 In him you were also circumcised, in the putting off of the sinful nature, not with a circumcision done by the hands of men but with the circumcision done by Christ,
12 having been buried with him in baptism and raised with him through your faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead.
13 When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your sinful nature, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins,
14 having canceled the written code, with its regulations, that was against us and that stood opposed to us; he took it away, nailing it to the cross.
15 And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.

I was preaching at a family service in a church near where I live. There were lots of children there. I put up a banner. On it was printed a date, in large letters: June 6 1944. 'What happened on June 6, 1944?' I asked them. A moment's silence then a little boy in the front row put his hand up. He's too young to know the answer to this, I thought to myself, but I asked him for his answer. 'Please can I go to the toilet?' he asked, loudly enough for the whole congregation to hear. The place dissolved in laughter for a few minutes as I gave him the required permission. Whether the rest of the congregation remembered anything else I said that morning is very doubtful!

June 6 1944 was, of course, D-Day, the day in the Second World War when Allied forces landed on the beaches of Normandy. I also asked the congregation that morning about May 8 1945. That was VE Day, when German forces surrendered unconditionally to the allied forces, and the war in Europe was over at last.

The German theologian Oscar Cullman likened Christian living in this world to being in Europe between D-Day and VE-Day: conflict raging all around – when would it all end? It is only as we look back on World War 2 that we see the significance of those two dates. We now know that the first was the decisive turning point in the war; the second, the surrender of the enemy and the end of the war, was only to come sometime later.

In his letter to the Christians in Colossae, Paul talks about the cross of Christ as the place where sin and evil have been defeated; the resurrection is the demonstration of that victory. But a moment's thought is enough to persuade you that it really doesn't look like that in our world, arguably more unstable now than it has been for many years. We express something of the frustration of this when we ask the questions expressed in the hymn 'Thy kingdom come, O God'.

Yes, says Oscar Cullman, our D-Day was the cross of Christ, but our VE-Day is still to come, we know not when. Until that day, the battle rages all around us. Sin, evil and death – our sworn enemies – have been defeated but they have not surrendered – not yet. So we have to live in the between times, with all their frustrations and their pain, our D-Day behind us and our VE-Day still in God's future. But this is the bigger meaning – the meaning that is so easily overlooked - of the cross and resurrection, of Good Friday and Easter Sunday.