

On the eve of World War I, the British Foreign Secretary, Sir Edward Grey stood at the window of his room in the Foreign Office. He looked across St. James' Park. It was dusk and the first of the gas lights along the Mall were being lit.

The next day he would face the Cabinet and persuade them that the time had now come to declare war on Germany. As the sun set that evening, he turned to his friend, the journalist and editor of the Westminster Gazette, and uttered words that would become both famous and prophetic: *"The lamps are going out all over Europe, we shall not see them lit again in our lifetime"*.

How perceptive was that heart-felt comment as the darkness of war fell over a continent; indeed, over the world. Over the next four years, more than 9 million soldiers would be killed. World War 1 would leave 3 million widows and nearly 6 million children without parents. Altogether, it is calculated that some 800 million people were affected in some way, either directly or indirectly. More than half of the entire world's population during that time.

100 hundred years ago today was to be the end of the war to end all wars. Of course, it didn't. And all this time later we still see conflict across the globe and the devastation it has brought, and continues to bring, to countless lives.

Darkness continues to be a synonym for that which is evil, for wrong-doing, for greed, sadness, grief, for conflict. We see breakdown of relationships at every level across society. We see those who end up in utter desperation, whether through their own actions or those of others.

As they went off to war over 100 years ago; all British Soldiers were given a Bible as part of their kit: uniform, gun, boots, Bible.

The Bible tells us that we were made to enjoy God and live in his world under his perfect rule. The reality is that we have not lived in God's world as we should. We have ignored him as Lord and Creator; have rejected his rule and gone our own way. History reveals evidence of what happens when we do that. The Bible describes it as living in darkness. And darkness speaks of hopelessness and death and of facing God's ultimate judgement.

If all of that describes darkness, then surely what we need is light. Something which brings hope; something which brings calm in the storm. Something to look forward to. Never it seems is that reaching out, more poignant than in times of war and conflict. A hope that has traditionally often been expressed in song.

One of those well-known songs of hope and of looking forward during the dark years of the Second World War had these words as a refrain: *"When the lights go on again all over the world. And the boys are home again all over the world. And rain or snow is all that may fall from the skies above. A kiss won't mean "goodbye" but "Hello to love". When the lights go on again all over the world. And the ships will sail again all over the world. Then we'll have time*

*for things like wedding rings and free hearts will sing. When the lights go on again all over the world."*

Reaching out in the darkness; in hope and expectation. Light that will dispel the darkness. A moment such as that which would be forever be known as the 11th hour, of the 11th day, of the 11th month, when the guns on the Western Front fell silent; and four years of the most bitter and devastating fighting were finally over. Later on this evening, on the recreation ground we will light one of many beacons that will symbolise the 'light of hope' that emerged from the darkness of war.

Whilst the Bible speaks about darkness, it also speaks of light. The light personified in the person of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. The one who said of himself: *"I am the light of the world. Anyone who follows me will never walk in the darkness but will have the light of life."*

Jesus as the light of the world revealed the truth about God. He revealed the truth about the darkness, and he came to give hope by reconciling a lost mankind to its Creator. In our acts of remembrance, we remember those who sacrificed themselves on our behalf. They gave their lives for our peace and our freedom. We should never forget that.

Jesus brought us peace with God by giving his life on the cross. The Bible tells us that as Jesus died, darkness came over the whole land. No sun, no moon, no stars, no time to light lamps. It was midday; but for three hours there was complete darkness. It showed that all the judgement of God on mankind's sin was unleashed on Jesus.

He died, yet rose again to show that the darkness had been conquered. That we can be free to follow him and walk in the light; that light which brings eternal life through faith in him.

I remember, just a few years ago, the moment I heard that the final surviving British World War 1 soldier had passed away. I can't really describe the feeling I had. It was not something I expected. But here it was; that remarkable generation had gone. There were no more eye witnesses. Those who knew what it was like in those trenches. It is right that we remember. Many lives were lost; and many other lives changed for ever.

The lamps did go out all over Europe, as Sir Edward Grey so famously put it. But equally, as the song puts it: the lights did go on again, all over the world. Even though it would be temporary. How much more as we reflect on our lives and the world today, do we need the light of God's love and grace in the person of Jesus Christ; the light of the world. The one who gave his life for us so that we might know life everlasting.