Hi folks,

Early morning, 6th June.

“Your task will not be an easy one. Your enemy is well trained, well equipped and battle hardened, he will fight savagely.”

So charged General Dwight D. Eisenhower, Supreme Commander of the Allied Forces in Europe, as the Normandy landings began 70 years ago this day. The very outcome of World War II was at stake.

However, this was not the only script he wrote. He prepared a second memorandum anticipating failure. I read the original handwritten script on display some years ago at the Imperial War Museum in London.

“My decision to attack at this time and place was based upon the best information available. The troops, the air, and the navy did all that bravery and devotion to duty could do. If any blame or fault attaches to the attempt, it is mine alone.”

Eisenhower must have borne an incredible amount of stress. For at the time victory was by no means assured. Too many risks, too many things to go wrong. And as it happened it was a hard-fought victory. Montgomery to the east – despite the huge resources at his disposal – failed to break the German lines.

It is so easy to read history as the story of the inevitable. Looking back it can all appear so predictable. But that’s not how Eisenhower saw it at the time – and to his credit he was prepared to shoulder the responsibility for catastrophic failure.

Looking back over two millennia it is so easy to assume that the growth of the Church from a tiny seed was inevitable. According to the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, in 2010 there were 2.18 billion Christians around the world, nearly a third of the global population.

I wonder how Peter and John would have reacted if you had told them this in Acts 4 while they were held overnight in prison at the behest of the Sanhedrin. Or when most of the Jerusalem Christians were forced to flee persecution just four chapters later. Try telling them that it would just be a matter of time before the Church replaced the Roman Empire.

As it happens, they would probably have expected no less – for one simple reason, they understood that God himself was at work. The Holy Spirit – so to speak – unleashed.

And yet, at the time it seemed one setback after another. one failure following each disappointment.

So the apostle Paul, for example, writes to Timothy with some urgency: “Do your best to come to me quickly, for Demas, because he loved this world, has deserted me and has gone to Thessalonica. Crescens has gone to Galatia, and Titus to Dalmatia. Only Luke is with me.” He then adds “At my first defence, no one came to my support, but everyone deserted me.” (2 Timothy 4)

It was never easy for Paul – and it won't be for us either. One setback after another. “Our task will not be an easy one. Our enemy is well trained, well equipped and battle hardened, he will fight savagely.”

What makes all the difference is that we are assured of the final outcome. “But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Corinthians 15:57). As ever, his resurrection changes everything.

This means a whole new way of thinking as we lay claim to the promises of the risen Christ. “But you are to be given power when the Holy Spirit has come to you. You will be witnesses to me, not only in Jerusalem, not only throughout Judea, not only in Samaria, but to the very ends of the earth!” (Acts 1:7-8)

That’s why we are marking Pentecost this year with an even bigger and better celebration this Sunday. Just one service, one main event, one celebratory party! The Holy Spirit deserves no less. Be there, he will!

Notices for Pentecost attached.

Cheers
Ross