

Keep Calm and Carry On

It was the spring of 1939. A brooding, foreboding darkness had crept into the world. And that darkness had a name – Nazism.

In April of 1939, the British government, fearing the worst, began to prepare for the possibility of war. The Ministry of Information was given the task to begin to prepare for the possibility that Britain would come under attack and to come up with an advertising campaign to strengthen the British people's resolve should war come. The ministry designed three sets of very simple motivational posters, each using only two colors, the crown of King George VI, and a unique typeface that would be hard for the enemy to duplicate. By August of 1939, these posters were on their way to the printers.

The first two posters were to be distributed within 24 hours of the outbreak of war.

The first read,

Freedom Is In Peril. Defend It With All Your Might

The second read,

Your Courage, Your Cheerfulness, Your Resolution Will Bring Us Victory

But the third poster was not to be distributed immediately upon the advent of war. The third poster was to be held in reserve and to be distributed ONLY should the darkness cross the channel and Britain be occupied.

Unfortunately, the preparations the British made for war were well warranted.

In the early morning darkness of September 1, while people slept, the disquieting hum of aircraft is first heard over Poland, and the bombs begin to fall.

The British and the French, knowing and fearing Germany's territorial ambitions, issue an ultimatum to Berlin – evacuate your troops out of Poland or face the consequences.

On September 3, after Germany fails to abide by England's ultimatum, England declares herself at war with Germany. And France follows shortly thereafter.

Within hours of this declaration, the first British ship – a passenger cruise ship is torpedoed in the Atlantic and 112 passengers and crew are lost.

The dogs of war slip the leash and the tide of war sweeps through Europe.

The ferocity of the German blitzkrieg was unprecedented and France falls swiftly and completely in only 45 days.

In the short span of ten months, much of free Europe had fallen to the Nazi darkness.

But there remained one prize the Nazis had not yet won, but which they desperately wanted: Britain.

In the summer of 1940, the roar of war which was at first so distant, could now be heard on the British coasts as the batteries defended her ports.

And in the summer of 1940, as night fell on the British, the blanket of war was pulled over Britain herself as the cacophony of airplane engines and the whistling of bombs falling to the earth pervaded her great cities. And from their shelters, the British people could hear the roar of the bombs hitting the earth as their cities were being scorched and leveled.

War, once so far away, was now everywhere around them: in the sea, in the air – war brought to their very homes – it seemed as if their whole world was on the verge of utter collapse.

In today's gospel reading, Jesus is speaking with his disciples in Jerusalem about the fall of their beloved Jerusalem, the end of the world, and the coming of the Son of Man.

As they stand looking at the temple, with the people coming in and going out, with the smoke of the sacrifices rising into the heavens and the sound of worship coming from the courts, it must have been difficult for the disciples to accept Jesus' words. Their city was occupied by the Romans, yes, but it was going to be completely destroyed? People would be running to the hills? Really? This temple that had stood so long? This City so full of people and life would lay desolate?

Yet Jesus is firm. He has been telling them about the Kingdom of God and how it is coming nearer and nearer both in his person and in time.

Jesus tells them not to be afraid, rather, they are to stand up and raise their heads – because the time of their redemption is coming near. Jesus tells them to keep a cool head – not to be weighed down with anxiety, not to give themselves over to gluttony and excessive living – to stay sober. Rather, they are to stay alert and be ready for the day that is coming.

In two weeks we will begin the season of Advent – a time of waiting and preparing. Not only waiting and preparing for Christmas, but waiting and preparing for Christ's return in glorious majesty. And after 2,000 years, we Christians are still waiting for Jesus' return. We have seen nations and Kingdoms rise and fall. Plague and pestilence have threatened our very survival. We have seen horrific natural disasters and the widespread destruction of some of our greatest civilizations. We have experienced the bottomless abyss of war and witnessed the unthinkable

genocide of millions of our fellow human beings. We have lived through revolutions, financial collapse, and have wondered again and again how this world was going to survive. And yet it has, and so have we.

The civilized world now faces a new Evil. We have seen its bloody fingerprints in New York, in Baghdad, in Beirut, in Sydney, all over Syria, in Nigeria, in Cairo, in Istanbul, and again in Paris. We have watched in horror as human beings are beheaded, children are kidnapped and sold into slavery, planes are flown into buildings, as young girls are used as objects, assaulted, and forced to marry, our gay brothers and sisters are thrown from the rooftops, and innocent bystanders thousands of miles away are executed indiscriminately because they are “infidels” and not worthy of life.

And make no mistake. This new Evil is theological at its core. This new threat is a fundamentalist, radicalized, militaristic interpretation of Islam that has amassed territory and coalesced in what has become known as the Islamic State. In a recent article in the Atlantic magazine, Graeme Wood writes that “The Islamic State is no mere collection of psychopaths. It is a religious group with carefully considered beliefs, among them that it is a key agent of the coming apocalypse.” ISIS believes that it is their God-given duty to usher in the apocalypse and to cleanse the world of all non-believers, including fellow Muslims who do not accept their perverted theology of hatred and death.

And let me be clear lest I be misunderstood – the vast majority of Muslims throughout the world reject this movement and consider the theology of ISIS to be a dangerous perversion of their tradition. At a recent “Meet your Muslim Neighbor” event in Greenville, Akan Malici, professor at Furman University and a member of the Greenville Islamic community, explained (paraphrasing) “We understand why Americans are afraid of them... we Muslims are afraid of them too.”

Egypt’s president, Abdel Fattah al-Sisi, said, "It's inconceivable that the thinking that we [Muslims] hold most sacred should cause the entire Islamic world to be a source of anxiety, danger, killing and destruction for the rest of the world." “Is it possible,” he asked, “that 1.6 billion (Muslims) should want to kill the rest of the world’s inhabitants — that is 7 billion — so that they themselves may live [according to this view of Islam]?”

So how do we meet this Evil that seeks death and destruction? Regardless of how politicians and nations respond, how do we as Christians respond to this theology of hatred and death? By offering an alternative – a theology of love, joy, and life – by offering Christ. For Jesus came not to bring death and destruction, but to bring life and love that we might have both abundantly. He came not to condemn the world but to save the world from itself. As Christians we know this and understand this. And our belief in the triumph of love and life is the most potent weapon we have. Rather than instilling hatred, Christ infuses love, rather than celebrating death, Christ

celebrates life, and rather than calling for the destruction of the world, Christ invites us to be his hands of help and healing and to build a better world.

For the end of the story has been written, and Jesus has shared it with us. No matter what the world throws at us, no matter what powers may rise and fall, no matter what we face personally or corporately, we are to live our lives with confidence as children of the living God, assured that our place in the Kingdom is secure.

As Paul tells us in Romans 8:38-39:

For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

That is Jesus' promise to us. Whatever befalls us, nothing can separate us from his love, and nothing can rob us of our inheritance as citizens of the Kingdom of love and life. And that is the response the Church must give.

We know how World War II ended – the British survived – they withstood the German assault and when the United States was forced into the war by the attack at Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, the tide of war began to turn.

The poster that the Ministry of Information prepared in 1939 in the event that Britain would be occupied was never distributed. In 2000, the poster was discovered in a small bookshop called Barter Books in Alnwick, Northumberland. The owner decided to post it in the shop and customers began asking for copies of it. Since then, this iconic phrase and image has been copied hundreds of thousands of times. You can see it in posters, coffee cups, T-shirts, even as an iPhone app. What is it?

Keep Calm and Carry On.

My brothers and sisters, with all the complexities, dangers and anxieties of living as disciples of Jesus in our modern world, let us live with confidence and strength. Let us live boldly and joyfully as citizens of his Kingdom and spread his Kingdom of love and life. Let us call Evil Evil, and meet Evil this without fear, but with the love of Christ.

My brothers and sisters, Keep Calm, and Carry On.

Amen.