

January 10, 2021

On the occasion of the 75th anniversary of the opening session of the United Nations General Assembly held in Methodist Central Hall, Sir Peter Marshall recorded this message to the Revd Tony Miles, Superintendent Minister, for the service held there for incorporation into the Morning Service.

It is a very great honour, Tony, and a very great pleasure for me, as the only World War II veteran still in diplomatic circulation, to join in this historic Anniversary Service.

I was still with the RAF in South East Asia on January 10, 1946. But I know what it was like to have been present. So, I just want to say a few things:

First, a great big renewed thank you for the self-sacrificing hospitality the Methodist Central Hall, Westminster offered to the General Assembly, at the direct request of Foreign Secretary Ernest Bevin, for those months of January and February 1946. It was a very real sacrifice.

Second, how fitting it was that the General Assembly should have been launched in a leading place of worship in the heart of war-torn, bomb-scarred, threadbare London, which had struggled, endured and suffered so much.

Third, the United Nations, under Commonwealth inspiration, has been the pioneer in managing international relations in a less disastrous way than the traditional heedless pursuit of individual national interest in rivalry and brinkmanship. We have instituted instead joint consultation and action to achieve the common good; and

Fourth, that is what we call diplomacy. But it is more than that. On any sustainable basis, and particularly when times are hard, it is also about faith, and it is grounded in the way we deal with other people. The Preamble to the UN Charter reaffirms our faith in "fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person, in the equal rights of men and women, and of nations large and small".

Finally, that epic first UN gathering is recorded with becoming modesty by a small memorial tablet, on the external walls of Methodist Central Hall beginning with the words "To the Glory of God and in prayer for peace.... "

We should be ever grateful for our far-reaching means of deliverance, vouchsafed to us by the vision and the steadfastness of our predecessors. Their prime determination was to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war. Ours, in a similar forward-looking mode, must be to get on top of coronavirus, in order the better to face together the multiple challenges and opportunities which lie ahead.

And not for one moment do we fail to salute in deepest gratitude all those who are striving so devotedly and so skilfully for our safety.