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6th June 1944: D~Day for the Allied Invasion of Normandy ~ the campaign to liberate Nazi-occupied north-western Europe, ultimately leading to victory on the Western front, had begun. It is 75 years ago since that momentous time and today is a different world where so many things have changed and yet some things, not at all. Most people alive then are now passed in to Glory and yet still we remember, with pride and grateful thanks, all that this past generation gave and endured that we might have the life we lead today. Watching the TV coverage of this Anniversary, I have been particularly moved when listening to some of the old service men and women reliving some of the awful times they went through. Yet for all this, it was the memories of those who did not return alive, from both sides, that they thought and spoke of most. These all respect with great dignity, those we are wont to call, 'The Fallen,' and when one looks on the rows and rows of immaculate, white tombstones, stretching as far as the eye can see in that, "...corner of a foreign field..." we can begin to picture all that was lost, despite the necessary victory we eventually achieved. My own Father served on the Atlantic Convoys and then in the Far East. He talked very little about his experiences and many servicemen, of whatever era, are mostly the same. In the early years, after the war ended, the burden of those memories was too heavy to be brought out for frequent airings and then, as the years went on, there was a heartfelt desire to move forward. Today, most movingly obvious, is the lack of rancour those still alive hold onto, whilst at the same time acknowledging what had to be fought for. They mourned all who had lost their life no matter the country they came from and I found it a salutary lesson, at a time when grudges and scores to settle appear popular choices for some in our world today.

A lady who lived in the old farmhouse here, Annie Page (a commemorative seat, placed after her death, stands in the churchyard), told me of her war years here and how she always felt safe when stood against the walls of the old church as bombers flew over what was then the Royal Radar Establishment in Malvern ~ Not too far from here as the crow flies or indeed as the Luftwaffe flew then. She felt a comforting solidity in these walls from all the prayer which had taken place down the centuries and the old church held a very special place in her heart until the day she died. As in the 1st World War, I imagine there will have been plenty of serving personnel who went to their local churches before they went away to war and, though this ancient church was by then redundant, it is not hard to envisage the many that will have come to it's quiet door ~ for a peace to take away with them; That same, safe solidity that Annie felt, built on the prayers of a thousand years in the old church's every stone.

If one looks through the Visitor's Books of the old church, it is self~evident that the vast majority of the world is represented on it's pages. I, myself, have talked to endless nationalities, different faiths and none and yet there is always a joy in sharing the differences in our cultures and of our faiths. For all those differences however, one thing is plainly apparent and it joins us all together whatever happens and no matter what we do: We are ALL, humankind. From different parts of our world, yes, different colours, different races, different

creeds, different faiths, different genders, different everything, YET, we are ALL the same species ~ in all it's beautiful, rainbow colours. If only we could keep this inalienable fact at the front and centre of our lives: ONE Family, (with ALL it's differences) Just Writ Large. On looking back over the last 75 years, those old service men and women in the cemeteries of Normandy knew without equivocation what was precious: Yes, it was a war that had to be won for the freedom of the world but in the end, the price that was paid was a loss of life, across the board, of great parts of the family of humankind and this is what they mourned the most.

John Donne's Poem, "No Man is an Island," was never more apt.

With all this in mind, it is most appropriate that the person who takes the Annual Service in the dear old church this year is The Archdeacon of Worcester, The Venerable Robert Jones. He will also give the Address. As a fluent speaker of German he is very involved in the diocesan partnership with Magdeburg and the Church of England's Meissen Agreement with the German Protestant Church. More, he has just returned from the Kirchentag Church Convention in Dortmund. The Kirchentag started as a lay movement, coming to terms with what had happened during the Second World War. Since 1949 it has always engaged with the issues affecting society and is all about how to live as Christians. The top politicians attend and you might even find a member of the government leading a Bible study. With the rise of the far right heard once again in Europe, we must thank God for a movement like this one. Archdeacon Robert, then, will be another in the long line of excellent people we have had to speak in this ancient and precious House of God. He is also a very jolly chap, as I can attest, and therefore we have an excellent service in prospect on all fronts. We hope you will join us.

It is with great personal sadness that I have to tell Old St. Bart's family that Barbara Wilday, Chair of The Friends of Old St. Bart's and so very involved with saving this precious church, died twelve months ago. She and her husband, Richard, were unstinting in their help and love of this place and there are so many happy memories. I know you will all join me in sending condolences to Richard and his family as they struggle to come to terms with their sad loss.

You are happily invited to The Annual Service of Celebration and Thanksgiving for the Life of Old St. Bartholomew's Church, Lower Sapey, on **Sunday 25th August 2019**, at 3pm. Do please bring a picnic chair to sit on during the service if you can and your packed tea for the picnic afterwards. There will be some chairs for those without one ~ thanks once again to Dave Cave. After last year's break, Candy Connolly and her band return to provide our music and our joyful thanks for this. Parking will be as directed on the day ~ thanks to Dr. Susanna and Mr. Allen Everitt once again. If anyone has difficulty walking then please do park in our yard for easier access (please telephone or eMail, as above, to arrange this and do arrive early on the day). Non disabled toilet facilities are available as usual.

Each of you is most warmly welcome then, whether you are old friends or new, as are any family and friends you may like to bring with you, to share in this most special of days in the dear old church's year.

My kindest regards to you all and I look forward to welcoming you on:

Sunday 25th August at 3pm

for The Annual Service of Celebration and Thanksgiving

for the Life of Old St. Bartholomew's Church, Lower Sapey, WR6 6HE (plus 1/2mile!)

Pat Prosser

