

## DUBROVNIK REMINDER



Image: Croatia.hr

September is here; the kids have gone back to school; summer is coming to an end and autumn is just around the corner; it is that time when everything starts again, and although I don't miss having evening meetings through the summer, by 1st September I am usually ready to begin the Methodist year afresh. However, I am only ready because I have had time away: time to rest; to read books; to catch up with family and friends; to perhaps experience something new that offers challenge and food for thought.

The latter, for me was a trip to Dubrovnik.

This year Andrew and I were lucky enough to spend a week on holiday in Croatia; it is a beautiful country, rich in history and culture; inhabited by hospitable people who welcomed us warmly. Whilst there we visited the historic city of Dubrovnik and as we walked the ancient walls which surround the city, we were surprised to see that nearly every building, even those that were centuries old, had a new roof. In talking to local people, we realised that, only 25 years ago, this place now filled with tourists and sightseers, had been heavily bombarded during the war which saw the bitter break up of the former Yugoslavia.



Image: getyourguide.com

Robert, the manager of our hotel, told us that he had fought in the war for 18 months; 'It is ridiculous' he said, 'I was expected to kill fellow human beings simply because they were not Croatian; yet they were still my neighbours, colleagues, associates. They were like me, human beings'

In the stories we heard there was still a sense of disbelief at the way division escalated so quickly into violence and ultimately war that destroyed,

not just buildings, but people's lives. I do not think for a moment that we might face a similar situation in this country and yet Robert's words were a timely reminder that, despite the issues that divide us, we should never lose sight of our common humanity, and as Christians, the call to love.



Image: bibleverseslogo.com

And that is Jesus' command again and again - to love:

'Love your neighbour as yourself'

'Love your enemies'

'Love each other as I have loved you'

Love: the easiest word to say yet the hardest one to do, for it demands that we put aside ourselves; our long-held views; our prejudices; our political affiliations; our ideological interpretations; our national identity; our assumptions and quickly made judgements; and instead

see people. To look not at labels of race, religion, or ideology, but to actually see fellow human beings; each made in the image of God and each as vulnerable and as hopeful and in need of love and affirmation as we are. Each valued so deeply by God that he entered our flawed humanity to show us the enormity of his love.

So, this summer, I was reminded by a stranger in a foreign land that it is not the things that divide us that matter, but that which unites us. And so, as everything begins again, may we aim in all things to be challenged by the command of the one we follow - to love.

Helen Kirk