A Service for 8th November, 2026 (StF) Remembrance Sunday

Call to worship: Micah chapter 4 verses 1 to 5

In the last days the mountain of the LORD'S temple will be established as chief among the mountains; it will be raised above the hills, and peoples will stream to it. Many nations will come and say,

"Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob. He will teach us his ways, so that we may walk in his paths." The law will go out from Zion, the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. He will judge between many peoples and will settle disputes for strong nations far and wide. They will beat their swords into ploughshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not take up sword against nation, nor will they train for war any more. Everybody will sit under their own vine and under their own fig-tree, and no-one will make them afraid, for the LORD Almighty has spoken. All the nations may walk in the name of their gods; we will walk in the name of the LORD our God for ever and ever. Amen.

Timothy Dudley Smith, a former Bishop of Thetford, Norfolk, echoes the Psalmist as he recognizes the might and glory of our timeless God. We shall sing hymn number 470, 'Lord, for the years'

1.Lord, for the Years, your love has kept and guided,
Urged and inspired us, cheered us on our way,
Sought us and saved us, pardoned and provided:
Lord of the years, we bring our thanks today.

2. Lord, for that word, the word of life which fires us,
Speaks to our hearts and sets our souls ablaze,
Teaches and trains, rebukes us and inspires us:
Lord of the word, receive your people's praise.

3. Lord, for our land in this our generation,
Spirits oppressed by pleasure, wealth and care:
For young and old, for commonwealth and nation,
Lord of our land, be pleased to hear our prayer.

4. Lord, for our world; when we disown and doubt you,
Loveless in strength, and comfortless in pain,
Hungry and helpless, lost indeed without you:
Lord of the world, we pray that Christ may reign.

5. Lord for ourselves; in living pow'r remake us –
Self on the cross and Christ upon the throne,
Past put behind us, for the future take us:
Lord of our lives, to live for Christ alone.

© Timothy Dudley-Smith {1926 – 2024}

Let us pray.

Lord of all, we have come to worship you on a solemn day, as we reflect upon the devastation and suffering of warfare. You created the universe and formed life on earth with wisdom and power that are far beyond our understanding. In your loving-kindness, you provide our daily needs and have honoured us with stewardship of our planet. Much more than that, you have sought to draw us lose to you as your earthly children. When we set ourselves against you, instead of destroying us, you took human form and lived among us as Christ Jesus, showing us how we ought to live. His life, death and resurrection have broken the power of sin and death and offers us everlasting life through faith in him. You are good, faithful, compassionate, just, merciful and truly

worthy of our adoration, so may we set aside all distractions and worship you in spirit, love and truth in Jesus' lovely name. Amen.

Thank you, Lord, for all that you give us, do for us and achieve in us, for we know how you have blessed us from our earliest days. Thank you, too, for experiences and opportunities that have given meaning to our lives, but most of all for your amazing grace that sent your Son, Jesus Christ, as our Saviour, guide and friend.

However, merciful God, when we think about our own nature, we recognize the conflict between goodness and wrongdoing and see how we let you down, because we say and do things that hurt and upset others and grieve you. Sometimes we act before we think and are unwilling to forgive those who have upset us. Lord, help us to change our ways, and forgive us as we turn away from what we know is wrong.

Gracious, loving God, you hear our prayer and assure us that our sins are forgiven and call us to follow you. Help us serve our neighbours with warm, caring hearts, so that our lives are peaceful and bring honour to your holy name, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

As our Saviour taught his disciples, we say:

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy Name; thy kingdom come; thy will be done; on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation; but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen.

A reading from Revelation chapter 22 verses 1 to 5

Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb down the middle of the great street of the city. On each side of the river stood the tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month. And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations. No longer will there be any curse. The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and his servants will serve him. They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. There will be no more night. They will not need the light of a lamp or the light of the sun, for the Lord God will give them light. And they will reign for ever and ever. Amen.

Reflection

The writer of Revelation was a Christian exiled on Patmos by the Roman Empire. We are not quite sure whether it was the same John who wrote the fourth gospel and letters, but Revelation is full of strange images and is difficult to understand. It was meant to be challenging, for the imagery was understandable to Christians, but meaningless to the Roman authorities, for it foresaw God's triumph over evil empires and a new, perfected age to come.

In the opening of chapter 22 John reminds us about the Garden of Eden, before sin fractured our relationship with God and our neighbours. Although Genesis is a rabbinic creation story, it recognized that human nature is a source of goodness or sinfulness and conflict. John has a vision of the New Jerusalem, a world where people are guided by the light of God's love, where we learn to co-operate, share resources and to set the interests of other before our own. Most importantly, it is a vision covered by the Hebrew word, 'shalom'. Shalom means peace, but not just an end to wars, but a state where people live in harmony with God and neighbours, where they enjoy well-being, can prosper in life, find fulfilment, rest free from fear and experience the blessing God wants for us all.

This is why Jesus came to us to command us to love one another, to show that serving others is a privilege not a burdensome chore and that might is not right, despite what some leaders believe. His good news is a light for the whole world, but some people prefer the darkness of vested interests, so it is up to us to keep shining our light to bring about change, starting in our communities and spreading wide. May peace begin with us and spread far and wide in Jesus' name. Amen.

We continue our worship with a hymn written in 1965 by Revd. Frederik Kaan, a Dutchman who served as Moderator of the West Midlands Province of the URC. Hymn number 696, 'For the healing of the nations,'

1. For the healing of the nations,
Lord, we pray with one accord;
For a just and equal sharing
Of the things that earth affords.
To a life of love and action
Help us rise and pledge our word.

2. Lead us, Father, into freedom;
From despair your world release,
That, redeemed from war and hatred,
All may come and go in peace.
Show us how through care and goodness
Fear will die and hope increase.

3. All that kills abundant living,
Let it from the earth be banned:
Pride of status, race, or schooling,
Dogmas that obscure your plan.
In our common quest for justice,
May we hallow life's brief span.

4. You, Creator-God have written
Your great name on humankind;
For our growing in your likeness
Bring the life of Christ to mind;
That by our response and service
Earth its destiny may find.

© Fred Kaan (1929 – 2009)

Let us stand, if we are able, as we remember those who have died for our freedom: here are words from Laurence Binyon's poem, "For the Fallen", which we shall use to lead us into our silence.

They shall not grow old, as we that are left grow old:
Age shall not weary them, nor the years condemn.
At the going down of the sun and in the morning
We will remember them.

Silence

When you go home, tell them of us and say:
'For your tomorrow, we gave our today.'

We shall lead into our intercessions with a hymn was written by Graham Kendrick for the 25th anniversary of the charity Tearfund in 1993. We shall sing hymn number 693, 'Beauty for brokenness,'

1. Beauty for brokenness, hope for despair,
Lord, in your suffering world this is our prayer.
Bread for the children, justice, joy, peace,
Sunrise to sunset, your kingdom increase!

2. Shelter for fragile lives, cures for their ills,
Work for all people, trade for their skills;
Land for the dispossessed, rights for the weak,
Voices to plead the cause of those who can't speak. ***Chorus:***
God of the poor, friend of the weak,
Give us compassion we pray:
Melt our cold hearts, let tears fall like rain;
Come, change our love from a spark to a flame.

3. Refuge from cruel wars, havens from fear,
Cities for sanctuary, freedoms to share.
Peace to the killing-fields, scorched earth to green,
Christ for the bitterness, his cross for the pain.

Rest for the ravaged earth, oceans and streams
Plundered and poisoned – our future, our dreams.
Lord, end our madness, carelessness, greed;
Make us content with the things that we need. ***Chorus:***

4. Lighten our darkness, breathe on this flame
Until your justice burns brightly again;
Until the nations learn of your ways,
Seek your salvation and bring you their praise. ***Chorus:*** ***© Graham Kendrick (born 1950)***

We begin our intercessions with a prayer for peace. Let us pray.
Lead us from death to life, from falsehood to truth. Lead us from despair to hope, from fear to trust. Lead us from hate to love, from war to peace. Let peace fill our hearts, our world, our universe. Let us dream together, pray together, work together, to build one world of peace and justice for all. Amen.

God of all nations, you came as Jesus to heal the world's brokenness and so we turn to you in prayer, asking you to bring healing and wholeness to our world, for there are so many situations beyond our power, but which to you are possible. Help us to change our ways, so that we always seek the well-being of people whose lives touch ours and to act as your earthly hands, by reaching out and offering practical support to neighbours who are in need or distress. Lord, grant us strength, faith and compassion to reflect your love for all-comers.

Today as we pray for peace, we remember all whose lives have been affected by wars of the last century and the present one, where foes often resort to terrorism, rather than formal conflict. We remember people killed in wars; for those whose bodies, minds and spirits have been crippled by conflicts, persecution, or terrorism and for the huge numbers of people displaced because of wars. We remember everyone who has lost loved ones and everybody who has made personal sacrifices, so we can live in the freedom they have made possible. Let us never underestimate the cost of the peace we enjoy, for it is great and terrible. In response to the price paid for our freedom may we be instruments of your peace, offering love for hatred, forgiveness for hurt and loss, hope in place of despair, joy for sadness, the gospel light for the darkness of sin and generosity for our neighbours' need.

Lord, we pray for a just end to wars in Ukraine, the Middle East, Congo, Somalia and Sudan. May you inspire leaders of the nations of the world so they govern with mercy and justice and do not resort to violence in order to have their own way. May they learn to negotiate and compromise when disputes arise, so their words offer grace and reconciliation rather than contempt, or threats.

Lord of shalom, of healing and well-being, let the light of your love shine upon people who suffer from sickness, grief or trouble, as well as everyone who mourns the loss of a loved one. In a time of silence, we pray for people for whom we are particularly concerned, trusting that you will know their need and will reach out in compassion to them.....
Help us to offer them practical support and friendship, but may you embrace them in your love, which offers healing, courage, hope, strength and transcending peace.

Gracious God, hear our prayer for our church, the churches in our Circuit and, indeed, the World Church. Sanctify us and grant us all the spiritual strength, energy, compassion, courage and vision to proclaim good news boldly and find new ways of bearing the light of your love in our community.

Abba, Father God, we ask you to bless us, our families and friends. Keep us safe from harm and help us to lead Christ-centred lives by sharing the abundance of your love with all-comers. In Jesus' holy name. Amen.

Our Gospel reading is Matthew chapter 5 verses 43 to 48

"You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbour and hate your enemy.' But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? And if you greet only your brothers, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that? Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect. Amen.

Our next hymn is from the United Methodist Hymnal from the USA. The first two verses were written in 1934 by Lloyd Stone a school teacher in Hawaii and the third by Georgina Harkness, a Methodist theologian in the late 1930s. It is set to Sibelius' "Finlandia". We shall sing, 'This is my song, O God of all the nations,'

1. This is my song, O God of all the nations,
A song of peace for lands afar and mine.
This is my home, the country where my heart is;
Here are my hopes, my dreams, my holy shrine;
But other hearts in other lands are beating
With hopes and dreams as true and high as mine.

2. My country's skies are bluer than the ocean
And sunlight beams on clover-leaf and pine;
But other lands have sunlight, too, and clover
And skies are everywhere as blue as mine.
O hear my song, thou God of all the nations,
A song of peace for their land and for mine.

3. This is my prayer, O Lord of all earth's kingdoms:
Thy kingdom come; on earth thy will be done.
Let Christ be lifted up till all shall serve him
And hearts united learn to live as one.

O hear my prayer, thou God of all the nations;
Myself I give thee; let thy will be done.
© Lloyd Stone (1912 – 1993) & Georgia Harkness (1881 – 1974) (to 'Finlandia' StF 419)

Address 2: *"Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you,"* Matthew 5:44

It is around three millennia since David felled Goliath with a well-aimed pebble from his slingshot, since when scientific and technological inventions have made conventional warfare almost untenable. Drones, guided bombs and current intercontinental ballistic missiles can destroy targets with ease while nuclear warfare could end life on earth. The two World Wars of the last century ended the idea that war was noble or a great adventure, especially in the United Kingdom which had felt protected as it is an island with a mighty navy. In December 1914 and April 1916, the German Navy bombarded North Sea coastal towns, firing shells seven miles to their targets. Though there were few casualties, the damage caused great alarm and attacks by Zeppelin airships from 1915 caused a crisis in Government, especially as aerial attacks reached across the country, including Tipton and Walsall. No one, it appeared, was safe and the Second World War repeated the horrors of total warfare on a greater scale until it culminated in the use of atomic bombs at Hiroshima and Nagasaki which ought to have cured our warring madness.

Most soldiers in the First World War hoped and believed they were fighting 'the war to end all wars', yet twenty-one years later, a Second World War had to be fought to overcome Fascism and Nazism. It is heart-breaking that even as we worship today wars are being fought in Ukraine and the Middle East, as well as in several less-publicized countries. A former professor at Harvard, George Santayana, wrote, 'Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it'.

Today, we remember the terrible cost of wars, particularly the world wars of the Twentieth Century, in material, personal and spiritual suffering and loss. We remember also the sacrifices made by so many people for our freedom: those who lost their lives not only in the World Wars, but also some eleven thousand British and Commonwealth service personnel who have been killed since 1945; people who suffered injuries of body, mind and spirit and for everybody who put their lives on hold until their war ended. Let us be ever grateful to the men and women who were prepared to lay their lives on the line for our sake, as well as those who still strive to keep us safe and preserve the freedom we enjoy. What can we do to show our gratitude, other than welcoming them when they return and making sure that any who have been injured on duty – and their families – receive all the help they need? We can play our part in making the kind of society that our young people are prepared to risk their lives defending.

Micah, a minor prophet eight hundred years before Christ was born, forecast that there will be a time when people **'will beat their swords into ploughshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not take up sword against nation, nor will they train for war anymore.**' Nearly three thousand years later, it may seem a forlorn hope, an unachievable ideal, but it is one we should, nevertheless, work for by seeking just settlements through negotiation rather than by bullets and bombs.

In his Sermon on the Mount, Jesus told the crowd, **"Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of your Father in heaven."** At first glance, this seems unrealistic, even impossible. After all, some people stick to the principle of getting their retaliation in first! How can we possibly love people who are hateful and our enemies? We can begin by separating 'loving' from 'liking'. God's love for sinners is as boundless as his hatred for sin, so we have a duty of care for one another, even if we can't bring ourselves to like somebody. How then can this be

achieved? The answer lies in imitating Christ Jesus – which is what we are called to do as his followers. He didn't just love his disciples: he reached out to all-comers – tax-collectors, the ceremonially unclean, fallen women, foreigners – even to occupying Romans. When he died on that cross at Calvary, our Lord gave his life to redeem all who sought forgiveness in his name. I hear you say, **"That's all very well, but how do we forgive our enemies?"** Here is one way.

Cornelia "Corrie" ten Boom was a Dutch watchmaker who, along with her family – all members of the Dutch Reformed Church, harboured hundreds of Jews amid the Nazi Holocaust to protect them from arrest. It's believed their efforts saved nearly 800 lives, but they were betrayed by a fellow Dutch citizen, on 28th February, 1944, so the entire family was imprisoned. Her father died soon afterwards, while Corrie and her sister, Betsie, were sent to Ravensbruck Concentration Camp. They managed to smuggle a Bible into that terrible place, so the sisters held secret acts of worship, comforting their fellow-prisoners. They endured great hardship and saw appalling cruelty meted out to others. Shortly before the end of the war, Betsie fell ill and was so starved and weak that she died. Two days later, Corrie was freed by mistake, but she was well away from Ravensbruck by the time the error was discovered. Later, Corrie discovered that all the women of the same age as she and Betsie had been killed, so she saw God's hand in her salvation. As a result, she travelled around Europe, telling about her experiences in a concentration camp.

One evening, at the end of a talk, a man approached Corrie and asked her to forgive him. He explained that he had been one of her guards at Ravensbruck, but had found it almost impossible to live with himself afterwards. Corrie's first reaction was to push him away, to shout and scream at him. Instead, she prayed for strength to forgive from the One who had asked his Father to forgive his killers at Calvary! Slowly, she took the former guard by the hand and offered him unconditional forgiveness.

Her death on her 91st birthday—April 15, 1983 – confirmed a Jewish belief that only specially blessed people are granted the privilege of dying on the date they were born. If Corrie Ten Boom could act in such a way, so can we. Let us not allow our anger to fester within our hearts, to poison our souls with its bitterness, to prevent us from moving on. Instead, may we seek the strength to rebuild broken relationships, to become a channel of God's peace and for that peace to radiate through the world. Amen.

We conclude our worship as we sing a hymn written by Marjorie Dobson, a Methodist local preacher, who was born in 1940 and became a local preacher when she was twenty. This hymn challenges us to continue to work for peace. Hymn number 131, 'By a monument of marble'.

1. By a monument of marble,
Or a simple wooden cross,
Here we gather to remember
Sacrifice and tragic loss.
Blood-red poppy petals flutter,
Each a symbol for a life,
Drifting in a crimson curtain,
Shadow of our constant strife.

2. Solemn silence now surrounds us
As we stand in memory.
Why must factions stir up conflict?
This eternal mystery

Troubles hearts and stirs the conscience,
Urges us to think again;
Face the curse of confrontation,
Yet reduce this searing pain.

3. For the sound of war still thunders
Through our planet, on this day.
Every hour new victims suffer,
Even as we meet to pray.
God, we need your help and guidance
In our constant search for peace.
Move us on to new solutions
As we pray that wars may cease. ***© Marjorie Dobson (b. 1940)***

Benediction

The peace of God which passes all understanding, keep *our* hearts and minds in the knowledge and love of God and of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord; and the blessing of God, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, remain with *us* always. **Amen.**