

A Service for 12th November, 2023 (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. Every man will sit under his own vine and under his 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.

“Sin and death and hell shall never / O’er us final triumph gain / God is Love, so love for ever / O’er the universe must reign.” We shall sing hymn number 36, ‘God is Love: let heaven adore him;’

1. God is Love: let heaven adore him;

God is Love: let earth rejoice;

Let creation sing before him,

And exalt him with one voice.

He who laid the earth’s foundation,

He who spread the heavens above,

He who breathes through all creation,

He is Love, eternal Love.

2. God is Love: and he enfoldeth

All the world in one embrace;

With unfailing grasp he holdeth

Every child of every race.

And when human hearts are breaking

Under sorrow’s iron rod,

Then they find that selfsame aching

Deep within the heart of God.

3. God is Love: and though with blindness

Sin afflicts the souls of men,

God’s eternal loving-kindness

Holds and guides them even then.

Sin and death and hell shall never

O’er us final triumph gain;

God is Love: so Love for ever

O’er the universe must reign.

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Let us pray.

Lord of all, we have come to worship you, for you made everything that exists throughout the universe and your power and wisdom are far beyond our understanding. You are good, faithful, compassionate, just, merciful, glorious, lovely, holy and truly worthy of our adoration. You understand us intimately, for you lived among us as Christ Jesus, who shared our very nature: our joys and woes, hopes and fears, our trials and

temptations and who not only came to show us in words and deeds how you want us to live, but through his death and resurrection broke the power of sin and death and offers us everlasting life through faith in him. Hear us, Lord, as we joyfully sing your praises, pray to you in faith and receive your word in Jesus' holy 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 lives, we see how we let you down, because we say and do things that hurt and upset others and we sometimes don't help people we see are in need or distress. We sometimes 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 learn to set aside old grievances.

Gracious, loving God, you 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 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.

Let us stand 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 sing a hymn by Alan Gaunt in which the peace he prays for is shalom: not only an end to warfare, but harmony, fulfilment, prosperity, good health and the richness of God's blessing. Hymn number 413, 'We pray for peace,'

**1. We pray for peace,
But not the easy peace
Built on complacency
And not the truth of God;
We pray for real peace,
The peace God's love alone can seal.**

**2. We pray for peace,
But not the cruel peace
Leaving God's poor bereft
And dying in distress;
We pray for real peace,
Enriching all humanity.**

**3. We pray for peace,
And not the evil peace
Defending unjust laws
And nursing prejudice,
But for the real peace
Of justice, truth and brotherhood.**

**4. We pray for peace,
Holy communion
With Christ our risen Lord
And all humanity;
God's will fulfilled on earth,
And all his creatures reconciled.**

**5. We pray for peace,
And, for the sake of peace,
Look to the risen Christ,
Who gives the grace we need
To serve the cause of peace
And make our own self-sacrifice.**

**6. God, give us peace;
If you withdraw your love
There is no peace for us,
Nor any hope of it.
With you to lead us on,
Through death or tumult, peace will come.**

© Alan Gaunt {born 1935}

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 sent Jesus to heal some of the world's brokenness and so we turn to you in prayer, asking you to bring healing and wholeness to our broken 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 so we 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 our 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 war, persecution, or terrorism and for the huge numbers of people displaced because of conflicts. 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 in our neighbours' need.

Currently, Lord, we pray for a satisfactory end to the war in Ukraine, in which by your grace Ukraine may remain an independent democracy and we pray for an end to the conflict between Israel and Hamas in Gaza. Heavenly Father, hear our cry of grief for the many lives lost as a result of the attack by Hamas in southern Israel and in subsequent fighting. Remember in your mercy people who have been bereaved, or injured, for those taken as hostages and ordinary civilians trapped in Gaza with nowhere to flee. We pray that the Knesset will not allow its desire for revenge to overcome its observance of international law.

Heavenly King, lead and inspire leaders of the nations of the world so they lead their people 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.

Merciful God, remember victims of disasters and famines. Bless the work done by relief workers and charities like the Disasters Emergency Committee. Grant them the resources they need for their work.

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..... Lord, help us to offer them practical support and friendship and 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 and grant us all the spiritual strength, energy, compassion, courage and vision to lead us where you want the Church to go. May we proclaim good news boldly and find new ways of engaging 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 John chapter 15 verses 9 to 17

"As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father's commands and remain in his love. I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete. My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. Greater love has no-one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends if you do what I command. I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you. You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit—fruit that will last. Then the Father will give you whatever you ask in my name. This is my command: Love each other." Amen.

Our next hymn is from the United Methodist Hymnal from the USA and is on your sheets. 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.

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Address: *"Greater love has no-one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends," John 5:13*

The First World War ought to have seen the end of all wars, for more than twenty million people were killed and tens of millions injured in little over four years' fighting. It was a mechanised war that saw the use of aircraft and airships in bombing both military and civilian targets, submarine warfare, poison gas and tanks. However, it was the squalor and sheer horror of trench warfare that ended forever the belief that war is in any way glamorous, or a great adventure. Most soldiers hoped and believed they were fighting 'the war to end all wars', yet twenty-one years later, the Second World War had to be fought to overcome Fascism and Nazism and it is a salutary thought that since the end of the Second World War there has only been one day when there has been no fighting somewhere in the world. It is heart-breaking that even as we worship today wars are being fought in Ukraine and Palestine, either or both of which could spread to other countries. A former professor at Harvard, George Santayana, wrote, 'Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it'.

The Hebrew word, *zakar*, means to remember, think of or mention and it was used to remind the Israelites why they ought to honour the covenant with the Lord. In Leviticus chapter 19, we have, **'When an alien lives with you in your land, do not ill-treat them. The alien living with you must be treated as one of your native-born. Love them as yourself, for you were aliens in Egypt. I am the LORD your God.'** I commend those words to Israelis and Palestinians today as we continue to hear of the horrors of the war against Hamas which began five weeks ago.

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 in not only 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 not forget the men and women who have been 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 also 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 work for by seeking just settlements through negotiation rather than by bullets and bombs.

After the Last Supper, whilst he led the disciples toward the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus told them, **“My commandment is this: love one another, just as I love you. The greatest love a person can have for his friends is to give his life for them. And you are my friends if you do what I command you.”** At first glance, this seems simple enough: after all, it is very easy to love our friends, our fellow Christians – isn’t it? A quick survey of Church history – from the churches in First Century Corinth to the present day suggests otherwise. Indeed, the opening of the First Letter to the Corinthians shows how factions were already at work, **some following Paul, others Cephas / Peter, others Apollos and yet others Christ!** If we can’t live in peace as Church, how then can we hope to love strangers, or even opponents? How can we possibly love people who are hateful? 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.

Rudi was conscripted into the Wehrmacht towards the end of the Second World War as soon as he reached military age. He was taken prisoner and transported to the United Kingdom. However, when he was released, he remained in this country and, after some time as a committed Christian, he became a Minister in the Methodist Church. He was appointed to the Stour Valley Circuit and whilst serving there, he met David, a young Jewish man. They met socially, talked and although memories of the Holocaust continue to haunt David, a friendship began between Rudi, as a result of which David was invited to look at the gospels and discuss them. After a time, David attended one of Rudi’s churches and became convinced that Jesus is the Messiah, so he became not only a Christian, but a gifted local preacher, for as a Messianic Jew, David has a profound understanding of Hebrew history, customs and Torah. His Passover/Pessach services are a wonderful experience.

Sadly, Rudi died a number of years ago, but at his funeral David quietly recited the Kaddish, a Hebrew prayer for the dead and, as Rudi’s coffin was taken from the chapel, he said aloud, “Shalom, my dear friend, Rudi!” He remarked to me about times when he and Rudi remembered in wonder that Rudi, who had served in an army that had persecuted Jews, was the one who had brought him salvation in Christ!

I am convinced that David and Rudi became friends not only by the grace of God, but because they recognized one another as individuals, as children made in the image of the Lord. They weren’t blinded with prejudice against a race, or political movement, or anything else that exposed differences, rather than those things we have in common. **As we recoil from images of wounded and dead children, both Jewish and Palestinian, in the latest conflict, may we work all the harder for the cause of**

peace and learn to love one another for what we have in common and for the sake of the Prince of Peace. Amen.

We conclude our worship as we sing Sebastian Temple's paraphrase of a prayer by St. Francis of Assisi. Hymn number 776, 'Make me a channel of your peace.'

1. Make me a channel of your peace.

Where there is hatred, let me bring your love;

Where there is injury, your pardon, Lord;

And where there's doubt, true faith in you. *Chorus:*

O Master, grant that I may never seek

So much to be consoled as to console;

To be understood as to understand;

To be loved, as to love with all my soul.

2. Make me a channel of your peace.

Where there's despair in life, let me bring hope;

Where there is darkness, only light;

And where there's sadness, ever joy: *Chorus:*

3. Make me a channel of your peace.

It is in pardoning that we are pardoned,

In giving unto all that we receive,

And in dying that we're born to eternal life.

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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.**