

A service for 9th November, 2025 Remembrance Sunday (StF)

Call to worship: Psalm 46 verses 8 to 10

Come and see the works of the LORD, the desolations he has brought on the earth. He makes wars cease to the ends of the earth; he breaks the bow and shatters the spear, he burns the shields with fire.

"Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth." 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.

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Let us pray.

Lord of creation, you gave life to the universe and everything in it. You provide our daily needs and offer us salvation through Jesus Christ, who took our human form and lived among us after we had rebelled against you, so we might see your true nature and understand how you want us to live. Moreover, by his crucifixion and resurrection, Jesus broke the powers of sin and death, offering us new life through faith in him. Hear us, Lord, as we sing your praises, pray to you in faith and listen to your word today.

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 for this beautiful world over which you have given us stewardship, for people who have guided, inspired and loved us, but most of all thank you for your Son, Jesus Christ, without whom we are lost and helpless.

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 distress or in difficulties. We sometimes act before we think and are unwilling to forgive those who have upset us. Today, on Remembrance Sunday, we see the tragic effects of human sinfulness magnified on a worldwide scale. Lord, help us to change our ways, and forgive us as we learn to set aside old grievances and live in peace with our neighbours.

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.

Our next hymn was written by Marjorie Dobson, a Methodist local preacher, who came from County Durham. She was born in 1940 and became a local preacher when she was twenty. Her writings reflect her concern for those who feel disconnected from faith by their image of the church as being outdated and irrelevant in the Twenty-First Century. 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)*

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 and sisters, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that? Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect." Amen.

Address: *"But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you"* **Matthew 5:44**

At eleven o'clock on 11th November 1918, the First World War ended: a war in which twenty million people were killed and tens of millions injured in little over four years' fighting. 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. 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, so the hopes of that generation who fought in the Great War have not really been fulfilled, though it may have been the thought that they were fighting 'the war to end all wars' that kept them going. As I speak, there are wars being fought in Ukraine, Congo, Somalia and Sudan, whilst there is a fragile peace in the Holy Land.

Today, we remember the terrible cost of wars, in material, personal and spiritual suffering and loss, but also the sacrifices made by so many people for our freedom: those who lost their lives in not only the World Wars, but also approximately 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, also, service men and women who are still risking their life in conflicts, besides policemen and women on many of our streets in an age of terrorists, here and abroad. We should be thankful that they are prepared to lay their lives on the line for our sake.

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 all, it was Sir Winston Churchill who led this country through the Second World War, but who declared, 'Jaw, jaw is better than war, war.'

Currently, we are living in an increasingly polarized world where political opponents are vilified, where people with challenging, but legal viewpoints are 'cancelled' in universities and civilised debating seems to have gone out of fashion. It is far easier to close down someone whose opinions differ from ours, but unless we listen and argue our case – without name-calling or labelling – we shall never find middle-ground. It was because we were united for a common cause, despite our different opinions, that we

prevailed in the Second World War. However, I am concerned about the current flying of the Union Flag, or St. George's Cross on lampposts, for while I am proud of the United Kingdom, though not about everything in our history, I worry about the motivations of people who have displayed them. They are often decried as 'fascists' and 'racists' and while I am sure that some endorse the views of Tommy Robinson, an extreme xenophobe. some have genuine, if misguided fears about asylum-seekers and hotels that currently house them. A third group may be acting in defiance at a perceived ban on flying flags, but unless we are willing to talk to one another – and listen to one another's opinions, we just provide ammunition for extremists to spread their poison.

It isn't easy to love people whose views are hateful to us, but we must not confuse loving with liking. Jesus would not have like the opinions and lifestyles of the ceremonially unclean, tax-collectors, fallen women, foreigners – even occupying Romans, whom he encountered, but he reached out to all-comers offering grace and salvation. When he died on that cross at Calvary, our Lord gave his life to redeem all who sought forgiveness in his name, not just an exclusive elite. You may still say, **“That's all very well, but how do we forgive our enemies?”** Here is an example of how it can be done.

In 1942 Singapore fell to the Japanese and its English-born Bishop, John Leonard Wilson, was sent to Changi Gaol, accused of spying. There he was tortured by Kempei-Tai, the Japanese secret police, who were experts in psychological warfare. For eight months he was severely beaten and endured appalling torture. During periods of torture he was taunted by his enemies, who asked why God did not save him. Bishop Wilson replied,

“God does save me; he does not save me by freeing me from you or punishment, but he saves me by giving me the spirit to bear it.” When they asked him why he did not curse them, he told them that, as a follower of Jesus Christ, he was taught that we were all brothers and sisters. However, he felt unable to forgive them until, in his own words, **“By the grace of God, I saw those men not as they were, but as they had been; as little children, as children loved by their mothers and fathers, as children sharing love with their brothers and sisters – before they were brutalised by false values.”** Only then was he able to truly forgive and he not only survived the war but a number of his Japanese captors came to Bishop Wilson asking to be christened, because they recognised something special in his ability to forgive.

If we see our opponents as children made in God's image – before they became parties to false values – we can avoid demonising or labelling them and exchange our opinions with civility. May we learn to offer kindness to people we find it difficult to like, for by being generous and warm-hearted, we may find they become less objectionable – perhaps even friendly to us and others around us. Jesus offers us unconditional love, even when we are at our most unlovable. He calls us to share his love with our neighbours, for peace begins with each of us as individuals. May we live as he calls us to. 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.

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Let us 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.'

The authors of our next hymn, John Bell and the late Graham Maule were members of the Iona Community and have written a number of striking and challenging hymns, usually set to old Scots ballads. This one is set to 'O waly, waly', which I hope you will recognize. The hymn recognizes ordinary, uncelebrated people, who, empowered by the Holy Spirit, have blessed us. We shall sing hymn number 746, 'For all the saints who showed your love,'

1. For all the saints who showed your love
In how they lived and where they moved,
For mindful women, caring men,
Accept our gratitude again

2. For all the saints who loved your name,

Whose faith increased the Saviour's fame,
Who sang your songs and shared your word,
Accept our gratitude, good Lord.

3. For all the saints who named your will,
And saw your kingdom coming still
Through selfless protest, prayer and praise,
Accept the gratitude we raise.

4. Bless all whose will or name or love
Reflects the grace of heaven above.
Though unacclaimed by earthly powers,
Your life through theirs has hallowed ours.

© J. Bell (b. 1949) & G. Maule (1958 – 2019)

In our prayers of intercession we shall bring our concerns to God. for people nearby and far away. Let us pray.

God of all nations, we turn to you in prayer, asking you to help us to change our ways, so that we always seek the well-being of people whose lives touch ours and act as your earthly hands, reaching out and offering practical support to neighbours who are in need or distress. Lord, grant us strength, faith, steadfastness and compassion, so we may share your love with all-comers.

Today as we pray for peace, we remember all whose lives have been affected by wars and terrorism throughout the last century and the present one: for people who have died in war; or who have suffered life-changing injuries in body, mind or spirit; for the huge numbers of refugees whose lives have been changed forever by the dark shadows of conflict; for everyone who has lost loved ones through mankind's inhumanity to his fellow man and for 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.

Lord, we grieve that wars are still being waged across the world and we pray that a just and lasting peace will be established in every land afflicted by conflict. Inspire national leaders to negotiate and compromise when disputes arise, instead of resorting to force. May they learn to govern with mercy and justice which are the foundations of enduring peace. And Lord, remember in your mercy, all victims of warfare, terrorism, discrimination and oppression, that they may receive the courage, faith and support they need to rebuild their lives. May we be instruments of your peace, offering love for hatred, forgiveness for hurt and loss, hope for despair, joy for sadness, generosity for want and the gospel light for the darkness of sin.

Lord, grant healing, renewed strength and hope to people who suffer from any kind of sickness or trouble, by experiencing your presence in their time of need. We pray, too, for people who are living with a dementia and their carers and families, who seek to support them. Remember, too, neighbours who are mourning loved ones at this time. In a time of silence, we shall bring to you the names of people for whom we are concerned ... Lord, hold everybody for whom we pray in the warm embrace of your love, in which they may find healing, courage, comfort and transcending peace.

We pray for our church, our Circuits and for the worldwide Church: unite us in love and outreach, so we bravely bear good news and peace to our neighbours, both friends and strangers.

Abba, Father God, we ask you to bless us, our families and friends. Keep us safe from harm and help us not only to lead good lives but to share the abundance of love you bestow upon us with a sceptical and sometimes hostile world. In Jesus' holy name. Amen.

Our closing hymn is from the United Methodist Hymnal from the USA and is on our 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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Benediction

God grant to the living, grace; to the departed, rest; to the world, peace; and to us and all the faithful, life everlasting; and the blessing of God, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, be with us now and for ever. **Amen.**