

A service for 14th November, 2021 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, we acknowledge your wisdom, might and glory as we meet to worship you on this solemn day. Your Word made everything that exists throughout the universe; your love sustains every living being and your grace offers us salvation through Christ Jesus. Your love for sinful humankind is unmerited and free, for even when we rebelled against the teachings you gave us through the patriarchs and prophets, you did not abandon us, but came to us as Jesus, 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.

A prayer of thanksgiving and confession. Let us pray.

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 where we live. Thank you, too, for people who have guided, inspired and loved us and for experiences

and opportunities that have given meaning to our lives. 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. 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.

Reflection

I have worn an ichthus pin badge on my jackets for many years to show I am a Christian. When I first wore an **ichthus badge**, my mother decided to buy a fish brooch for when she worshipped at **Birmingham Cathedral**. Naturally, she wanted a better badge than mine, so she my dad visited a high-class shop in Birmingham's **Jewellery Quarter**. The assistant was keen to make a sale, but didn't know what mom meant when she simply asked for a '**fish brooch**', rather than an ichthus badge, though I don't suppose she'd have known what an ichthus badge was, anyway. After a brief search, she told my mother that the shop had no fish brooch, but then added, '**We do have a lovely parrot brooch!**' Mom had to settle for a simple ichthus like mine!

This tale highlights a more serious issue: how can you tell somebody is a **Christian**? Certainly, there are few traditions, food customs, or costumes to mark **Christians** out, whereas practising Jews wear a **kippah, tallit and tefillin** to worship, moslems wear a **prayer cap and shalwar kameeze**, while many Sikhs wear **turbans and carry Kirpan**, a sword, though usually Sikhs in Britain use a symbolic kirpan. Although some **Christians** wear a **cross**, or **ichthus**, many don't, for we don't need costumes or symbols if we obey Jesus' command to his disciples, "**Love each other.**" It sounds simple, to be identifiable because of our outstanding love for one another: no badges, or costumes, just letting Jesus' love shine through our lives, yet in reality it can be a real challenge, because some people are hard to like. The good news is that Jesus loves and cares for us even when we let him down and all he asks is for us to keep trying to care for people we don't like if we see them in difficulties, or in need, for that is what love is all about. Amen.

Our next hymn was 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) (courtesy of Stainer & Bell Ltd.)

In our prayers of intercession we shall bring our concerns to God. Let us pray.
God of all nations, you came as Jesus to bring healing to the world's brokenness and so 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 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, steadfastness and compassion so we may show your love for 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 been killed; for all who have suffered life-changing injuries in body, mind or spirit; for the huge numbers of displaced peoples whose lives have been changed forever by the dark shadows of war; 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. 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 of all, lead and inspire leaders of the nations of the world and leaders of opposition groups, granting them wisdom and compassion so that they lead their people with mercy and justice and not resort to violence in order to have their own way.

God of creation, as COP 26 comes to an end, recent terrible floods and wildfires on several continents are salutary reminders about the effects of climate change and our collective failure as stewards of this planet. We pray that resolutions made at the

conference won't be reneged upon, but will begin the necessary changes to our lifestyles before it is too late, so that future generations will have a habitable world in which to live.

Lord, hear grant healing, renewed strength and hope to people who suffer from any kind of sickness or trouble, not only as a result of the professional care and support they receive, but by experiencing your presence in their time of need. We pray, too, for people who are living with a dementia and their friends, carers and families, who seek to support them and for whom the past year and a half has been incredibly difficult. Reassure and comfort all of them in their confusion and distress and bring them from the shadows of despair into the light of your hope. Remember, too, neighbours who, as a result of the pandemic, are lonely, afraid, depressed and burdened by worry and everyone who has lost loved ones, in particular people lost during this pandemic. In a time of silence, we shall bring to you the names of people for whom we are concerned Lord, help us to offer them practical support and friendship as well as sympathy, but hold everybody for whom we pray in the warm embrace of your love, in which they may find healing, courage, comfort and peace.

We pray for our church, our Circuit and for the worldwide Church: unite us in love and outreach, so our words and actions share good news with our neighbours and reveal that Jesus is indeed, the risen Lord and Saviour of the world.

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 boldly take the light of the gospel to a sceptical and sometimes hostile world. In Jesus' holy name. Amen.

*We shall sing a hymn by Alan Gaunt, which uses peace to illustrate the full meaning of the Hebrew shalom: harmony, well-being, prosperity, rest, contentment – in other words, the full blessing of God. However, shalom comes at a cost! We shall sing hymn number 719, '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,
No any hope of it.
With you to lead us on,
Through death or tumult, peace will come.

© Alan Gaunt {born 1935}

Act of Remembrance (11 a.m.)

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.'

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.

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

At eleven o'clock on 11th November, 103 years ago, 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.

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 the nearly 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. 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, as well as supporting both the Poppy Day appeal and the Invictus Games? We can play our part in making the kind of society that those who suffered and died in the wars of the Twentieth Century dreamed of, a society our young people are prepared to risk their lives defending, a society based on the love and forgiveness of Jesus Christ.

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!** 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 and 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. He didn't just love his disciples: he reached out to all-comers – the ceremonially unclean, tax-collectors, 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 love our enemies?”** We need to separate the idea of loving and liking. The parable of the Good Samaritan teaches us how, for Jews and Samaritans hated one another with a passion – worse than the hatred between Tutsis and Hutus in Africa, of Jews and Arabs in the Holy Land or Catholics and Protestant during the Troubles in Northern Ireland. Despite their enmity, the Samaritan saw the stricken Jew on the road to Jericho and was filled with compassion. As far as he was concerned the injured man was not a despised enemy, but somebody in desperate trouble, so he tended his wounds, carried him into Jerusalem on his donkey and cared for him at an inn. Moreover, he paid the innkeeper to look after the man whilst he went on his way, promising to pay any extra costs on his return. The parable does not tell us whether or not the Samaritan would have liked other Jews, or if the injured Jew was grateful enough to change his opinion about Samaritans – but we can hope so.

Let us 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 respond to Christ's love for us by living in peace with our neighbours, remembering that Jesus loves them just as much as he loves us.

I'll finish with prayer for peace:

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.

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.**