

A service for 10th November, 2024 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. You took our human form and lived among us after we had rebelled against the teachings you gave us through the patriarchs and prophets, 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 this morning. Amen.

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. 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 which takes us into our prayers of intercession was written by Graham Kendrick for the 25th anniversary of the charity Tearfund in 1993 and followed his visit to India the previous year in which he had seen the contrast between the opulence of the rich and grinding poverty of ordinary villagers. 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)*

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, you came as Jesus to bring healing to this broken world 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 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 to 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; 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 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.

Lord, we pray for a just end to wars in Ukraine, Gaza, the West Bank and Lebanon. May the tensions between Iran and Israel not escalate into open warfare with global consequences. 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 lasting peace. And Lord, remember in your mercy, all victims of warfare, terrorism, discrimination and oppression, that they may receive the courage and support they need to rebuild their lives and find healing. 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, 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 carers and families, who seek to support them. 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 are lonely, afraid, troubled, burdened by worry and all who are in mourning. 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 our words and actions share good news with our neighbours and offer peace to 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.

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.'

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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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 106 years ago tomorrow, 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 raging in Ukraine, the Holy Land, Somalia and Sudan.

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 – which is what we ought to be doing as his disciples. 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 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 waterboarding, or water hose torture as it was known then.

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.”

As a result, Bishop Wilson found grace through Christ to forgive and love his brutish torturers, so after eight months, the Kempei-Tai realised that they had failed to break Bishop Wilson's spirit. He was returned to the prison camp, where he took communion, using grains of rice and water. Interestingly, at the end of war, a number of his Japanese captors came to Bishop Wilson asking to be christened, because they recognised something special in his ability to forgive. There we have an answer: seek the grace to forgive through prayer to the One whose love allowed him to ask God's forgiveness for those who were crucifying him, although they did not realise he was laying down his life to offer them and us new life. 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 respond to Christ's love by living in peace with our neighbours, remembering that Jesus loves them just as much as he loves us. 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.**