

Call to Worship (from the National Council of Churches USA website and inspired by Isaiah 2:4, Isaiah 52:7)

How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of those who bring good news;
who publish peace, who bring good tidings, who publish salvation, and proclaim, “Your God reigns!”
God will judge among many peoples, and they shall beat their swords into plowshares
and nation shall not lift up sword against nation: neither shall they learn war any more.
Let us lift up our voices and praise the God of peace and justice.

Hymn: For the Healing of the Nations (*Singing the Faith*, #696)

Fred Kaan (1929-2009) © 1968 Stainer & Bell

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 in action
help us rise and pledge our word.

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.

Lead us forward 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.

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.

Prayer

God of love and peace, we come together today to remember:
To remember with thanks those who have given their lives in service of others.
To remember with sadness the suffering, destruction and pain caused by human conflict.
We come also to commit ourselves to be peacemakers and peacekeepers wherever we can.
Be present among us as we worship You, and as we open ourselves to Your Word.
To You be all glory, now and forever. Amen.

Scripture: Psalm 85:7-13

A Time of Remembrance



They shall grow not 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.

(You are invited to enter a period of silence)

Prayer of Confession (from the Christian Aid website)

God of peace, forgive us when we have participated in that which turns people against each other;
for fueling anger and harbouring vengeance, for not heeding your call to love one another. Inspire
us never to give up on the hope that your life offers us, and the courage to see past war and
desolation and live for the day when it will be peace. Amen.

Scripture: Matthew 25:1-13

Reflection

The problem that the five foolish bridesmaids had was *not* that they fell asleep. All the women fell asleep. The problem was that while they slept, their lamps used up the oil that was in them, and without any spare, they ran out of oil for their lamps. The parables only concern is what they brought with them when they left the house. Maybe this is not a story about how much oil you have. Maybe this is a story about the oil you carry with you. When your lamp goes out, you may have gallons of oil sitting at home; but it is not going to do you any good there. What does the oil you carry with you look like? What is the oil? Perhaps it is not a commodity that we buy and sell.

There are some kinds of oil you cannot borrow from anyone else. Teenagers learn this; you can borrow someone's homework and get by on the assignment, but you can't borrow the hours they put in studying for the test. There are some reserves that no one else can build up for us. What if we think about oil in terms of our spiritual lives and that our task is to be a lamp, a light for others? When the oil runs out, then the light goes out. A Christian without oil cannot be the light of the world for anybody, no matter how much they want to.

The time comes when we all have to draw on the oil we already have, and that oil is going to come from what fuels us spiritually right now. Our personal spiritual disciplines fill us up. We cannot minister to others if there is nothing there. We cannot survive the dark times ourselves if we are already running on empty. John Wesley called these Acts of Piety - Daily scripture reading. Daily prayer or meditation. Participating in study together. Weekly Worship. Monthly Communion. Periodic Fasting. Perhaps there are other ways that fill you too: A walk by the river. Walking a Labyrinth. Journaling. Painting. Coloring your prayers. Cooking. Gardening. Reading. Wesley also taught us that Acts of Mercy were important spiritual disciplines. Being in mission to others through acts of compassion or charity and acts of justice and advocacy. In a pandemic, we might have to get creative and it might look different to before, but it is still possible.

I know that many of you have found during this pandemic that it is your faith and those spiritual disciplines that you have done over the years that have given you the strength to get through. If you are not doing these things, then now is a good time to start, and if you are, maybe things are getting stale and you need to shake it up a bit. Let us concentrate on filling our lamps and filling them out of joy, because then we'll be ready to see Jesus and even go to the party with him.

The parable ended with Jesus saying, "Keep awake for you know neither the day nor the hour." Jesus seems to understand that there is some waiting that we will be called to do. It might be a longer night and wait than we are expecting, but morning will come. Waiting is an act of faith. It is a part of our faith journey. We need to learn to wait well. Part of waiting is sleeping and resting as the wait is long, and part is filling our lamps with fuel to sustain us; the fuel that comes from our acts of piety and acts of mercy.

So, let us fuel up and then wait patiently and actively together because Christ came, Christ is here now, and Christ is coming again.

- *How much oil is in your lamp as we wait together for the coming of God's Kingdom?*
- *As we remember the sacrifices of those who have gone before us and knowing that peace is still a long way off, how should we wait?*

O Holy One, we are not very good at waiting, nor sometimes at filling our lamps. Open us to new ways of refueling so that we do not run on empty. Fill us with your assurance and peace as we wait for you to come in the night. Help us to see where your Kingdom is already breaking in, and give us the patience to faithfully and joyfully wait for your presence. Amen.

Prayers of Intercession (Jack Knox, Salem Mennonite Church, Oregon)

Gracious Lord, we dream of a world free of poverty and oppression, and we yearn for a world free of vengeance and violence. And we pray for your peace.

When our hearts ache for the victims of war and oppression, help us to remember that you healed people simply by touching them..., and give us faith in our ability to comfort and heal bodies and minds and spirits that have been broken by violence.

When the injustice of this world seems too much for us to handle, help us to remember that you fed five thousand people with only five loaves of bread and two fish..., and give us hope that what we have to offer will turn out to be enough, too.

When fear of the power and opinions of others tempts us not to speak up for the least among us, help us to remember that you dared to turn over the tables of money changers..., and give us the courage to risk following you without counting the cost.

When we feel ourselves fill with anger at those who are violent and oppressive, help us remember that you prayed for those who killed you..., and give us compassion for our enemies, too.

When we tell ourselves that we have given all we can to bring peace to this world, help us to remember your sacrifice... , and give us the miracle of losing a little more of ourselves in serving you and our neighbors.

We pray for ourselves – *in a moment of quiet hold before God what is on your heart today.*

Walk with us, Lord, as we answer your call to be peacemakers. Increase our compassion, our generosity and our hospitality for the least of your children. Give us the courage, the patience, the serenity, the self-honesty and the gentleness of spirit that are needed in a world filled with turmoil and terror.

Through Jesus Christ, our Lord, who taught us to pray saying: *Our Father ...*

Offering

You are invited at this time to remember your local church and to give generously of your time, talent and treasure.

O Gracious God, receive our gifts, tokens of thanks for your extravagant blessings, signs of trust in your coming reign of justice, peace, and love; in Jesus' name. Amen.

Hymn: *God! As with Silent Hearts (Singing the Faith, #698)*

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God! As with silent hearts we bring to mind
how hate and war diminish humankind,
we pause - and seek in worship to increase
our knowledge of the things that make for peace.

Hallow our will as humbly we recall
the lives of those who gave and give their all.
We thank you, Lord, for women, children, men
who seek to serve in love, today as then.

Give us deep faith to comfort those who mourn,
high hope to share with all the newly born,
strong love in our pursuit of human worth:
'lest we forget' the future of this earth.

So, Prince of Peace, disarm our trust in power,
teach us to coax the plant of peace to flower.
May we, impassioned by your living Word,
remember forward to a world restored.

Blessing

Go from here with your lamps filled with oil to wait with peace in your hearts.
And may God the Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer be with us all, now and always. Amen.