

Lest we forget



Act of remembrance:

Ideally at 11am today, you might like to hold a poppy and reflect on it as you sit in silence, or put the service from Whitehall screened on BBC1 from 10:15am.

Either way be quiet, and reflect in silence for a couple of minutes, then read the familiar armistice poem "For the Fallen" by Robert Laurence Binyon (1869-1943), published in *The Times* newspaper on 21 September 1914.

*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.*

Call to worship

And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly, to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God
(Micah 6 v 6)

Hymn: StF 132 O God our help in ages past <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N-hN740J6qA>

O God, our help in ages past,
our hope for years to come,
our shelter from the stormy blast,
and our eternal home.

Under the shadow of thy throne
thy saints have dwelt secure;
sufficient is thine arm alone,
and our defence is sure.

Before the hills in order stood
or earth received her frame,
from everlasting thou art God,
to endless years the same.

A thousand ages in thy sight
are like an evening gone,
short as the watch that ends the night
before the rising sun.

The busy tribes of flesh and blood,
with all their cares and fears,
are carried downward by the flood,
and lost in following years.

Time, like an ever-rolling stream,
bears all its sons away;
they fly forgotten, as a dream
dies at the opening day.

O God, our help in ages past,
our hope for years to come,
be thou our guard while life shall last,
and our eternal home.

Isaac Watts (1674-1748)

Let us pray together

Creator God, you walk with us in our world, and have done so in times of conflict as well as in times of peaceful cooperation. We thank you for the inspiration that Jesus shares with us, as he reached out to individuals to bring peace in their lives. Today we pray especially for those whose gave their lives in the service of others in the conflicts of our age. We pray for them, for their families and friends, for all who mourn their loss. We pray for our world today and as we remember all those caught up in the conflicts of our present age, may we continue to work for peace, justice and hope in today's world. We bring our prayer in the name of Jesus Christ, the prince of peace. Amen.

Old Testament reading: Isaiah 65:17-25

Gospel Reading: Luke 21: 5-19

Reflection:

Preaching one Sunday just after Britain invaded Iraq in 2003, I happened to say, somewhat clumsily that this was perhaps the scariest experience of my lifetime. I was perhaps right; I had witnessed on the television news the horrors of the attack on the twin towers in September 2001 and maybe this kind of retaliation was inevitable and was quite scary. An elderly lady took me to task after the service, telling me that I didn't know what I was talking

about, she could remember the listening to the radio announcement on Sunday 3rd September 1939 when the Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain announced that Britain was once again at war with Germany. Maybe I had been unclear in what I had said, or maybe she hadn't heard correctly, but I took her comments on the chin. There have been comparisons over the last two years between the pandemic experience and the wars, and I think that they are equally ill thought through, from my generation down, the wars are events in history, for my parents and their contemporaries, these events were scorched into their memories.

I sat with a delightful lady who had grown up in London, she longed to talk with me about the war years and whilst her memory of the present time wasn't quite as good as it could be, she could remember with crystal clarity being walked down to the station with her bag and her gas mask as little girl, they made the same journey for several days and on the final day, her class were herded onto the train and taken away to the country, she was only about seven or eight at the time. It broke my heart hearing this little story and I realized that while I grew up hearing stories about the war from my parents, there was a gulf between my knowledge and experience and those who had actually lived through what was happening at the time. My friend was an old lady now, but over seventy years later, memories of her childhood were still vivid and real to her.

As you read my reflections today, we are possibly all aware of the situation in Ukraine as the army stands its ground against the might of the Russian army and deserve our admiration and support for all they are doing. Sunday by Sunday, I lead people as we pray for peace in the world and if I am not careful, I use glib language about living in peaceful times. In my experience, during my lifetime, I have never witnessed peace. As one conflict appears to be resolved, another one strikes up somewhere else, and even in our supposedly peaceful nation, knife and gun crime continue to blight the people of this country, domestic violence is reported far too frequently and peace sometimes feels to be so illusive that I wonder if we will ever truly live in peace.

The Prophet Isaiah is writing at a time when the Israelite people have lived under the threat of war, then been held captive in Babylon and this passage is written following their return to freedom, while the memories of their experiences are still very raw for them. It is into this experience that Isaiah prophesies with a message of hope for a brighter future. The words inject this image of a perfect world, where war will be no more, where anger and divisions will be resolved, where there will be a land of plenty and the world will be perfect, just as God created it. As Christians, we hold the word of scripture dear to our hearts and it is because of these words, that we cannot lose hope. Those who perish in war give up their lives so that the world might be a better place. The prophesy of Isaiah is almost three thousand years old, yet we must still cling to the message of hope he brings.

Turning to our gospel reading, Jesus is facing the wrath of the crowds and the destruction of his own human frame. This passage of scripture never appears to be the perfect manifesto for somebody considering a life of faith, Jesus paints a bleak picture of what the future holds. Around this time of year, we sometimes start to think about the second coming and these words of Christ set out the time preceding the time of God. If we're not careful, all we can focus on is the negative, we are being warned of difficult times ahead, but during all of this, we need to keep our sights firmly set on God and on his promise of eternal life.

To Ponder:

- We pray for peace in the world, peace in the hearts and minds of all people. Do you feel as though our prayers are in vain and that after three thousand years since the words of Isaiah and two thousand years after the words of Christ, we pray in vain?
- Isaiah, then Jesus, and also St John in the book of the Revelation talk about a new heaven and new earth, a perfect world, do you think that this is fanciful idealism? Or a real prospect for the future?
- If the new heaven and the new earth are a part of our DNA as Christians, what does this mean to the way we worship God, the content of our prayers and the way we live our lives. Are there any changes you need to make as you journey towards the new Jerusalem?

A time of prayer

We pray for our world, in all of its diversity. We pray that we may listen to each other, seek what is good and just and walk together so as to find peace, hope and blessing in our world today.

We pray for our faith, for our journey with God and with members of our church family. We give thanks for the way that God has called us, and continues to call us, as disciples of Jesus.

We pray for those who are ill, for those whose loves are challenged by illness. We remember all those who mourn, and on this remembrance Sunday we pray for all who remember loved ones who were, and continue to be, caught up in the conflicts of our world.

We remember those who have died, giving thanks for times shared together. May we, together with all the Communion of Saints be blessed as we are held in God love.

We bring our prayers in Jesus' name. Amen

The Lord's Prayer

Our Father

Hymn: StF 712 Put peace into each other's hands https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5VI_sd5A-h8

Put peace into each other's hands
and like a treasure hold it,
protect it like a candle-flame,
with tenderness enfold it.

Put peace into each other's hands
with loving expectation;
be gentle in your words and ways,
in touch with God's creation.

Put peace into each other's hands
like bread we break for sharing;
look people warmly in the eye:
our life is meant for caring.

As at Communion, shape your hands
into a waiting cradle;
the gift of Christ receive, revere,
united round the table.

Put Christ into each other's hands,
he is love's deepest measure;
in love make peace, give peace a chance,
and share it like a treasure.

Fred Kaan (1929-2009)

A prayer of blessing from the Baptist Peace Fellowship

Send us out to be beacons of peace
in a dark world of conflict.

Make us instruments of peace
for whoever we meet

and wherever we go,

In the name of the Prince of Peace,

Our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ. Amen

May God bless us, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen