



The
United
Reformed
Church

The United Reformed Church in Lion Walk
Christ Church United Reformed Church
The United Reformed Church at Chappel

Sunday 8th November 2020

Call to Worship:

May the peoples praise you, O God;
May all the peoples praise you.
May the nations be glad and sing for joy;
For you rule the peoples justly.
May the peoples praise you, O God;
May all the peoples praise you.

May God give wisdom to those who work for peace,
so that a more secure future may be ensured for all.
May God give courage to those who strive for justice,
so that the causes of conflict may be overcome.
May God give strength to those who seek to break down barriers,
that divisions of race, colour, creed and culture may be ended.
May God grant that wherever war, or the threat of war, continues to cause fear;
a way of reconciliation may be found and harmony established among people and
nations.

Prayer/Meditation:

Draw us together into your presence, God of peace.

We come today remembering that even in the darkest of days, your flame of hope and
new life flickers, drawing us on to find the good and to illuminate the world with your
Gospel of love.

Help us to find you in the smallest of things and the most ordinary of our experiences.
For you are the great source of our being and the power that sustains us through your
Holy Spirit.

When we search hard for you, we may miss your presence in the everyday - so, help us
to look out for you - in the face of friend and stranger, in the wonder and beauty of our
world, in the complexity of design in the creativity of artist and scientist.

We live in you, the great mystery of our being which is beyond our understanding - yet
revealed - in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. You are there underpinning our
lives, offering to us all that we need to live well. All too often we grasp after our
prosperity and our safety, building walls of self-sufficiency, finding "the other" and
difference to be a threat to us.

We fall into ways of war when your ways are of peace. On this day of remembrance,
when we pay tribute to those who have given so much when war became the way, we
confess the faults of nations who have gone to war and missed your ways of peace.
Lord have mercy upon us.

Your ways are of mercy, Your heart is for reconciliation, so help us to accept the hand of
forgiveness that You offer. Help us to leave behind what has weighed us down and to

seek the ways of friendship and peace. Bring us the peace of being part of your offering of forgiveness, and to embrace our role of being peacemakers in the course of our ordinary lives.

The Lord's Prayer:

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. Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the Kingdom, the power and the glory for ever. Amen

Reading: Micah 4:3-5

Hymn 705

Our 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 your 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.

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

Our God, our help in ages past,
our hope for years to come:
be thou our guard while troubles last,
and our eternal home.

- *Isaac Watts*

Reading: Luke 7:1-10

Reflection:

On Remembrance Sunday we are remembering and giving thanks for the sacrifice of those who have been killed and injured in defence of their nations. We appreciate that the freedom and democracy which we hold so dear have been protected and defended over the years in armed conflict, and that many thousands have given up their lives in order that others can live long and peaceful lives, free from the threat of oppression and violence. We acknowledge, too, that there are many today whose lives are in danger, indeed many who are losing their lives day by day in order to make the world as safe as possible a place for peaceful people to live in.

Up and down the country on Remembrance Sunday, townspeople and villagers gather at local war memorials to stand in silent recognition of the sacrifice that has been made on their behalf. Many of those attending such services probably have little in the way of religious faith, they do not know nor care whether God has delivered their nation from the threat of oppression and destruction in successive wars. All they know is that others have died for them, and they want to express their thanks in an act of remembrance, a service of memorial. And they want somehow to express their solidarity with those of the armed services today who continue to meet death and mutilation on their behalf. It is a solemn time.

On Remembrance Sunday we also recognise and condemn the evil of war, and speak of a desire for peace, an end to warfare and conflict, and above all we look forward to a time when war shall be no more, when swords shall be beaten to ploughshares and spears to pruning-hooks, when the resources, the energy and the lives that are expended on warfare are able to be channelled into peaceful pursuits, and there is no more conflict.

They 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 any more.

We acknowledge and honour the bravery and sacrifice of those who have died, and the suffering of those whose continuing lives have been damaged forever by injury, but we are mindful too of the wrongness of armed conflict.

The unfortunate thing about these two aspects of remembrance is that they are so often seen to be in conflict or competition with one another. Those who emphasise the memorial aspect of Remembrance will accuse others of trivialising the death and suffering of those who fell in war, while those who take a more pacifist line will say it is all very well and good to be thankful for lives laid down in our defence, but how and when is the killing and the conflict going to be brought to an end if all we ever strive, all we ever pray for, is peace through strength, through victory over others?

If we look to the Bible for some kind of resolution to this tension, we find little help. It would not be difficult to find passages in the Old Testament in which God encourages the people to go to war and promises support and ultimate victory. It would be equally simple to quote verses that support a pacifist stance. This is one of those tense debates in which it would be pointless and dangerous simply to say, 'The Bible says, ' and leave it at that (never a good idea in any case).

What we can perhaps do is find out if there is anything in the teaching of Jesus about conflict and war, about the establishing of peace through conflict.

First, we can see that throughout his ministry Jesus spoke of making a non-violent response to intimidation and conflict; he spoke of a Kingdom that was an alternative to the Roman Empire, under whose rule he and his people lived; he showed by the way he lived his life - and more vividly by the way he died - that he had no interest in achieving peace through power. Yes, the Kingdom of which he spoke was a Kingdom of peace, but that peace was one that was to be based on love, not on authority or power. It would seem from looking at Jesus' life that his emphasis would have been very much on turning away from those things that lead to war and conflict, and the establishing of a realm of peace and justice based on love.

But then we read in Luke's gospel this story of Jesus encountering a Roman centurion whose servant is dying. A centurion is a representative of the Roman empire, the empire of which Jesus is so critical and which he believes is so wrong. Yet not only does Jesus offer his help to this man, but he is so impressed with him that he says, 'Not even in Israel have I found such faith.'

Now perhaps this little snippet from Luke doesn't help us very much as we debate an issue which only arose in the 20th century when Remembrance Sunday was first established, but it maybe does show us one thing. This representative of the Roman Empire was one whose faith could impress Jesus to the point where he commended him for it. For Jesus, the empire had two faces. It was an all-embracing authority in Jesus' world; it was an evil empire that oppressed its people and maintained peace only through its superior strength; but its other face was the face of the centurion, the man whose faith was greater than any in Israel.

There must have been the same tension among Jesus followers when he praised the centurion. 'How can you commend this servant of the empire?' some would have asked. 'How could he fail to show compassion to the suffering, empire or no empire?' others might have replied. There was a tension in Jesus' society and, indeed, in Jesus' teaching that his followers had to live with, just as there is a tension about Remembrance that we have to live with.

And so we walk the narrow way, condemning war and conflict as a symptom of the sin and selfishness of humankind, while at the same time honouring and respecting those who gave, and continue to give their lives in war.

We will continue to walk this line, year by year remembering more and more dead, offering our sympathy to those who have lost dear ones, expressing our solemn and very real gratitude for the sacrifice of others, while at the same time deploring the conflict that has made their sacrifice necessary, and praying and working for a world of peace and justice through love, following Jesus to the world which he taught is God's world, where nations study war no more and peace flows like a river.

Amen

HYMN 625

God of freedom, God of justice,
God whose love is strong as death,
God who saw the dark of prison,

God who knew the price of faith:
touch our world of sad oppression
with your Spirit's healing breath.

Rid the earth of torture's terror,
God whose hands were nailed to wood;
hear the cries of pain and protest,
God who shed the tears and blood;
move in us the power of pity,
restless for the common good.

Make in us a captive conscience
quick to hear, to act, to plead;
make us truly sisters, brothers,
of whatever race or creed;
teach us to be fully human,
open to each other's need.

Act of remembrance

(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.

Prayer:

Let us remember the two World Wars, and other conflicts which have devastated the lives of so many in the last 100 years; we think especially of those known to us.

We think of those who fought and gave their lives in a spirit of patriotism and duty; those who went reluctantly to a war not of their own making, and those who refused to fight through conscientious objection and were pilloried for their stand. We think of those who did not return, or those who returned injured or scarred in body or mind, and of refugees unable to return to their own homes. We think of those left grieving and bereft, struggling to rebuild their shattered lives.

We give thanks for acts of heroism and courage We lament lives lost in anger and fear.

Let us remember the horrific effects of our use of, and experimentation with, nuclear weapons.

We think of the suffering of the people of Japan, victims of our weapons of war, and those of the Pacific Islands who have suffered in our heedless nuclear testing. We think of those who must choose between the physical and moral risks of working in the arms trade, and the cost of losing their livelihood. We think of those who by their constant vigilance in peace camps act as a challenge to the morality of our reliance on military defence. We think of those who campaign for disarmament, and those involved in patient negotiations to secure peace.

We give thanks for acts of heroism and courage We lament lives lost in anger and fear.
Let us remember those engaged in the struggle for justice in Central and South America.
We think of those whose compassion compels them into political action for justice. We
think of those under threat of torture and death, and those forced to leave their homes
in fear. We think of those whose friends and relatives have disappeared into the blank
walls of official silence and unanswered questions.

We give thanks for acts of heroism and courage We lament lives lost in anger and fear.

Let us remember those who are working and fighting for peace and justice in the Middle
East and within the continent of Africa.

We think of those who are torn between their desire for peaceful protest and the
demand for armed struggle, and of those facing the despair of seeing no solution but
violence. We think of those rising to claim their dignity in a system which denies it, and
of the privileged who risk loss to speak out in challenge and solidarity.

We give thanks for acts of heroism and courage We lament lives lost in anger and fear.

Let us remember those caught up in violence and strife in Syria and Iraq.

We think of those who are the victims of illegal terrorism and of authorised brutality.
We think of those who are caught up in a spiral of violence and revenge, and of those
who grow up in a world shaped by fear and anger. We think of those who live with the
risk and vulnerability of trying to create a space for reconciliation.

We give thanks for acts of heroism and courage. We lament lives lost in anger and fear.

Let us remember those who, in living memory, we have been taught to label our
enemies.

We think of the Germans, the Italians and the Japanese, of the Russians, the Argentines,
the Iraqis, the Afghanistanis.. We think of them, people like ourselves, remembering
their dead, struggling to forgive and overcome bitterness, praying and hoping for peace.

We give thanks for acts of heroism and courage We lament lives lost in anger and fear.

Let us remember those in the United States of America and in our own nation engaged in
political, social and cultural conflict. Those who see their nation moving into a future of
greater freedom and restored prosperity, and those who fear a future in which
minorities are oppressed and the needs of other nations ignored.

God of Peace, Lover of Justice, Take our thanksgiving and turn it into active compassion
for the victims of aggression and violence, whether they are labelled aliens or allies,
enemies or friends. May they experience the grace of forgiving, and the healing power of
love. Take our rage, and turn it into potent anger at all forms of injustice, all attempts
to dominate others through violence, all identification of right with force. May our anger
burn until we see peace built of the foundations of justice and freedom from oppression.

Hymn 624

Father eternal, Ruler of creation,
Spirit of life, by whom all things are made;
through the thick darkness covering every nation,
light to our blindness, come now to our aid!
Your kingdom come, O Lord, your will be done.

Rulers and peoples, still we stand divided,
and, sharing not our griefs, no joy can share;
by wars and tumults Love is mocked, derided,
his conquering cross no kingdom wills to bear:
Your kingdom come, O Lord, your will be done.

Envious of heart, blind-eyed, with tongues confounded,
nation by nation still goes unforgiven;
in wrath and fear, by jealousies surrounded,
building proud towers which shall not reach to heaven:
Your kingdom come, O Lord, your will be done.

Lust of possession causes desolations;
and meekness has no honour in the earth.
Led by no star, the rulers of the nations
still fail to bring us to the blissful birth:
Your kingdom come, O Lord, your will be done.

How shall we love you, holy, hidden Being,
Unless we love the world which you have made?
O give us surer love for better seeing
your Word made flesh, and in a manger laid:
Your kingdom come, O Lord, your will be done.

Benediction

God, make us 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, and may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and
the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with each one of us and with all those we love, today
and for ever more. Amen