



The  
United  
Reformed  
Church

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

Sunday 12<sup>th</sup> November 2023

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.

Prayer/Meditation:

Lord of all, give wisdom to those who work for peace,  
so that a more secure future may be ensured for all.  
Give courage to those who strive for justice,  
so that the causes of conflict may be overcome.  
Give strength to those who seek to break down barriers,  
that divisions of race, colour, creed and culture may be ended.  
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.  
Lord, in your mercy,  
hear our prayer.

We come this day to remember and learn - to remember the lessons of the past: the cost of war;  
the price of peace; the scope of human evil; the extent of human self sacrifice. May we think  
on all we owe - lest we forget.

May we learn the lessons of the past - to live and work for peace; to fight only what is evil and  
corrupt; to serve and not to count the cost; to give our all in the cause of a better world. May  
we think on all we owe - lest we forget.

We come this day to remember our dependence on God: the power and beauty of creation; the  
faith of God's people throughout history; the life and witness of Jesus Christ; the love of God  
experienced day by day in our own lives. May we think on all we owe - lest we forget.

Let's pray:

Generation after generation,  
loving God, has lifted its hands and voice to you  
in search of peace - for a world in chaos,  
afame with anger, and torn by hatred.  
And thus we come on behalf of our generation.  
The horrors of war are no longer distant or hidden.  
We watch the terror unfolding, the smoke rising,  
the stricken bodies falling, the earth exploding.  
Fear and sorrow well up within us in equal measure.

With deep sighs approaching despair, we watch the march of death across the fields where  
people laboured in hope of harvest, and through their towns now turned to rubble.

We sense the breaking of your heart, the unfinished grieving of Gethsemane.

And we recognise that war is no accident.  
We have allowed evil the upper hand.  
Just grievances go unheeded, resentments fester  
and indifference clouds the wisdom and love that would save us.  
Forgive us for wanting peace without working for it,  
for mistaking talk of sacrifice for the real thing.  
Come, Lord, mend and remake us  
and show us the way that leads to true peace.

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: Isaiah 2:3-4

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 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.

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.

Reading: Matthew 5:43-48

Reflection:

Isaiah says: Nation will not take up sword against nation, nor will they train for war anymore.

Jesus says: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.

To remember something is to think of something we have experienced in the past and to bring to mind the sights and sounds, the thoughts and feelings of that time. On this Sunday in the year, we try to remember times of war, and the effects those times have had on people we knew, on families, and on nations. For some of us that remembering will be easier than for others. For some, memories of wartime will be vivid and real, because they have experienced them for themselves. Some will remember times of loss and sadness over the death or injury of loved ones in war. Others will be able to remember the actual fighting, will be able to see the sights and hear the sounds of the battlefield.

And even when we have no personal experience or memory of war, in these days we need only watch the news on television to get a vivid understanding of the suffering and sheer horror of war as we see live pictures from Ukraine and from Gaza. We can easily see how deadly, how tragic, how evil war is, but for an increasing number of people there will be no personal memory of war. The last war to have an impact on everyone in this country was of course the Second World War, and that happened long enough ago to make it part of history lessons in school. Nobody under the age of about ninety will remember much about it, and few remain who were old enough to have joined the forces and taken part in it. So all those people of all ages paying their respects at war memorials up and down the country today - what are they doing? What are they remembering? Especially those who are too young to really remember...

Are they perhaps remembering with sadness family members they never had a chance to meet? Or vaguely remembered faces and voices of fathers, uncles, cousins, grandfathers, who went off to war and never came back. And in that remembering, does God speak words of comfort and assurance. God's word in times of sadness is not only one of comfort, it is one of hope as well. Hope of a transformed, peaceful world. God's word, even when we ponder the tragedy of death, brings us to life; life lived here on earth in such a way that we ourselves may be worthy both of the sacrifice others have made for us, and of His promise of eternal life. God's word to those who live in the shadow of death is, "Rise up!"

History shows us just how many people have reacted to their circumstances by rising up and fighting against them. Many have devoted their lives to working for peace because of their experiences of war. Many have given themselves to campaigning on behalf of the poor because they themselves have experienced poverty.

So our sad remembering of wartime death is God's call to us to rise up and live. To live for peace and justice.

Our remembering may not all be sad, especially if we are too young to have been touched personally by the tragedy. Our remembering may be a remembering of gratitude. A quick glance at any history of the twentieth century will show that at a certain time in this nation's life - in 1940 - the freedom of all Europe was at risk. We may not have known those who fought. We may not have any personal memories of them, or of the fighting in which they were involved. But we can see plainly that the result of their struggle was peace in Europe - and we remember with gratitude.

And we can remember too with repentance. Not the first thing you might think of on Remembrance Sunday. Why, we might ask, do we have need to repent for the evil of others? When an aggressive nation invades another nation, and that nation tries to defend itself and the freedom of its people, and many are killed in the conflict, why should the invaded nation have to repent? And why, these days, should young people who have never been directly involved in any war, have to repent? Because wars are caused by nations - and very often individuals - whose hunger for power and control over others is such that they will go to war to get it - and we, sometimes at least, are just like them. No we don't have the authority to send the country into war, but how often have we been at war with members of our family, or neighbours, or friends? We remember in repentance and sorrow for the weakness of human nature which causes conflict. As we remember, we can ask God's forgiveness for the weakness that causes conflict; we can ask forgiveness for the whole human family which constantly allows its own selfishness to rule its thoughts and actions, and so often leads to war; and we can ask his forgiveness for ourselves for the part we play in adding to the conflict in the world with our own small fights and disagreements.

Then we remember with dedication. One of the reasons this day is celebrated annually is to make sure that the lessons of war are learned and never forgotten. In every city, town, and village in the country today, people are gathering round memorials to people who gave their lives in war. It's been estimated that a total of more than fifteen million people were killed in the second World War - that's about equivalent to the entire population of the Netherlands today. Numbers like that may be hard to take in, but one of the reasons we're here today is to try to understand the horror and suffering created by war, and to dedicate ourselves to peace. And the way we do that is by dedicating ourselves, in small ways and in our own lives, to living at peace with our neighbours, with God, and with ourselves.

Our remembering is with sadness for those who were lost and those who suffered; it is with gratitude for the heavy price paid by those who fought for freedom; it is with repentance and sorrow for the weakness that leads to war; and it is with dedication to peace and resolve to banish conflict from our own lives and from our world.

May God bless and confirm us in our resolve, that this world might become and remain as he created it and intended it - a world not of hate and conflict, but of love and peace.

Isaiah says: Nation will not take up sword against nation, nor will they train for war anymore.

Jesus says: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.

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.

Prayer:

Loving God, we give thanks today for all those who across the ages have been examples of courage, whose words and actions have given inspiration to following generations. In glad thanksgiving, we will remember them.

We give thanks for those who have had the courage to stand up for their convictions, come what may; to fight against evil and injustice, even at the cost of their own lives. In glad thanksgiving, we will remember them.

And especially this day we give thanks for those who displayed such courage in all the horror of war - those who fought bravely, who served faithfully, who sacrificed greatly. In glad thanksgiving, we will remember them.

And so we remember

All those who died in and from this country and those who died from the countries of the Commonwealth, allies and former enemies, during two World Wars;

Those who died in the wars that followed - Korea, Vietnam, the Falkland Islands, Iraq and Afghanistan and too many others;

Those who died in the Genocides of African Slavery in the Caribbean and the Americas, the Holocaust, the Congo, Cambodia, Rwanda, and too many others;

Those who died fighting for racial justice in the United States, South Africa and too many others;

Those who died in war and by terrorism in countries close to the heart of people of this community - Ireland, South Africa, Zimbabwe, Chile, Rwanda, Colombia, and in New York, Manchester and London.

Those who died yesterday and today and will die tomorrow in Gaza and Israel and Ukraine.

Those who continue to die day after day because of human greed and cruelty.

We remember

Those we knew

Those who were brave

Those who were afraid

Those who mourn and grieve

Those who carry the memory of war in their souls

Those whose scars refuse to heal.

God of the heavens,

creator of sun and stars

nothing is beyond your power.

Saviour of the downtrodden,

crucified by principalities and power,

nothing can separate us from your love.

Spirit of reconciliation and truth,

awakening the conscience of the just,

nothing is outside your redemptive love.

Embrace the people of this earth with the refreshment  
of forgiveness  
and the wholeness of your new life.

I invite you now to spend a few moments in your own prayer, in words or in silence, or simply in reflecting on the stories we have heard and the words we have read in our worship today.

Hear our prayer, Loving God, which we offer in the name of our Lord Jesus Chrst. Amen.

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

Now we conclude our worship with renewed inspiration to do the work of God.

To seek good, not evil, love goodness, and establish justice.

This the greatest offering we can make;

letting justice roll down like waters,

and righteousness like an ever flowing stream.

We go in peace, with love for our neighbours.

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