

worship notes

from the United Reformed Church



Sunday 10th November 2024
Proper 27 | Ordinary 32
Remembrance Sunday
The Revd Dr Lance Stone

Call to Worship

God is our refuge and our strength, a timely help in trouble.

Come, see what the Lord has done in every part of the wide world he puts an end to war

He breaks the bow, he snaps the spear, he burns the shield in the fire.

Stop fighting: learn that I am God, exalted among the nations, exalted in the earth.

Psalm 46: 1,8-11

The Act of Remembrance (may come here or elsewhere in the service)

Friends, let us remember in silence before God
all those who have died in war...

The silence

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.

(These words might be said by a child or young person if present)

We will remember them

Opening Prayer

Holy and gracious God, eternal source and end of all things:

we praise and worship you.

We rejoice in the wonder of your creation;

we give thanks that you have given us life that you have given us one another;

that you have given us a world to delight in.

All around us are signs of your handiwork and we would honour you, the Maker.

Confession and Pardon

O God, forgive us for our destructive ways

forgive us that we threaten what you have made,

and this morning we especially pray for forgiveness for war, and for all its horror.

We pray for forgiveness for the ease with which we resort to war;

for the casualties and the victims that it leaves in its wake;

for all the ways in which your good world is scarred

by conflict and our inhumanity to one another.

We confess our share in such a world, our failures to seek and to establish peace even in our own lives.

O God, have mercy upon us and forgive us.

Keep faith with us and lead us into ways of righteousness.

Show us the things that make for peace.

And we thank you that you have given us Jesus, the prince of peace, who has come and made peace by the blood of his cross.

Help us, we pray, to live in that power.

We pray all these things in his name,

As we join together in the words that he taught us, saying ...

(The Lord's Prayer may follow...) **Amen.**

All Age Activity

Lay out some or all the following items:

- A handkerchief
- A picture of an elephant (or an ornamental one if you have one)
- A picture of a forget-me-not (don't say what kind of flower it is)
- A shopping list (or a to-do list)
- A birthday card
- A loaf of bread

Ask: what links all these objects? Answer: they all have to do with memory, remembering. Go through each one:

- Handkerchief – once upon a time people used to tie a knot in their handkerchief to remind them to do something
- Elephant – the saying, 'an elephant never forgets'
- Flower – it's a forget-me-not
- Shopping / to-do list...
- Birthday card remembering and celebrating someone's birth
- Loaf of bread – Jesus commanded us to remember him in the breaking of bread on the night of the Last Supper, when he celebrated the Passover with his disciples.

Memory is an important theme in the Bible. We are called to remember the great things God has done, especially God's liberation of his people from Egypt in the Exodus, as Jesus was doing that night in the upper room. Such memories, however, are mixed: the Passover was a night of death and destruction as well as a night of liberation; the Last Supper was a dark night of betrayal besides leading to our salvation.

There is one more object that we could have been put on display – hold up a poppy. Some people may be wearing one today. Poppies are also about memory – mixed memories. On the one hand they remind us of the horror of war and its terrible cost. On the other hand we remember with gratitude lives lost in war.

This morning in our service in our reading we remember a particular woman because Jesus singled out for what she did. As is often said of those who fought and gave their lives in wars, we are told that 'she gave everything that she had'.

Prayer for Illumination

Living God, fashion and shape us by your Word,
that we might rise from death and destruction to life in all its fullness. Amen.

Reading

Mark 12:38-44

Sermon Notes

Theme: A lost cause?

Sermon structure:

- a) Recap the story which appears straightforward: Jesus watching people putting money in the temple treasury which consisted of 13 large collection boxes. He spies the poor widow – one of the most vulnerable people in his society – and commends for her tiny offering, in comparison with big sums being put in by rich people. She, out of her poverty, gave all that she had'. A story oven-ready for church treasurers promoting stewardship!
- b) Digging deeper...note the context of Mark 12:
 - i) controversies with the religious establishment who are trying to catch him out. Verse 38: 'beware of the scribes...' and then this stinging rebuke: 'they devour widows' houses. Jesus is condemning the entire rotten religious system, centred on the temple, which extorts money out of those least able to afford it. His primary reaction to seeing this woman's action is anger, not joy.
 - ii) These latter chapters of Mark, especially Mark 13, which speak of the immanent destruction of the temple due to the Jews' inability to recognise the things that work for peace – which came true in AD 70 with the destruction of the temple by the Romans (prefigured earlier by Jesus driving the money-changers out of the temple). In other words, not only is this woman being drained of all she had (the sense of the Greek is that she put in 'all the living of her' – in other words, her whole life) but it is in the service of a lost cause: the temple has a very short shelf-life.
- c) On Remembrance Sunday, this passage prompts the question of any war: was it a worth it? Was it justified? Was a costly sacrifice actually a waste, like this woman's sacrifice? E.g.:

- the 1st World War, supposedly ‘the war to end all wars...’ but the conditions of the Treaty of Versailles made that an impossible dream;
- 2nd World War - arguably easier to justify;
- Vietnam war with estimated 58,000 American casualties (apart from Vietnamese). US Defence Secretary at height of the war and a fierce advocate later confessed to deep regrets, saying, ‘ we were wrong, terribly wrong, and we owe it to future generations to explain why’;
- Northern Ireland? Iraq? Afghanistan? Ukraine? Gaza?

Christians must be honest about where war is a necessity and where it is a waste – like this woman’s offering.

- d) This woman could therefore be seen as a symbol of lost causes, of futility and of the futility of war. Yet, for all that, Jesus nevertheless commended her and her act. Jesus saw behind the context which rendered her sacrifice pointless to the spirit of self-sacrifice that motivated it. Maybe he saw in her willingness to ‘give all that she had’ something of what inspired and drove his own life.

What we see in the woman and in Jesus is that acts of self-giving, even when they achieve little or nothing, are essential to our humanity and to the humanising of an often oppressive brutal world. We are never more human than when we give of ourselves in love and in good faith – whatever the outcome.

Prayers of Intercession

O gracious, peace-making God,
 as we today remember the fallen, those who have died in conflicts,
 we bring before you today our war-torn world,
 where the strident din of hatred and conflict
 drowns out the sighs of peace and the whispers of reconciliation.
 We think of conflicts too numerous to mention,
 religious conflicts, political conflicts, civil wars - and we think of the effects of wars –
 of refugees and refugee camps and asylum seekers, and the maimed and the disfigured...
 We pray, God, for the United Nations, that it may be a force for peace.
 We pray for world leaders that they may act wisely and justly and for the good of all.
 And we pray for those who bear arms on behalf of the nation,
 that they may be endowed discipline and discernment, courage and compassion.
 We pray today for the United States of America in the aftermath of the election,
 praying for a peaceful and orderly transition to a new administration,
 for a healing of the divisions that have opened up in recent times,
 and for a recovery of trust and commitment to the common good.
 And we pray for our enemies, for those who wish us harm,
 that you will turn the hearts of all towards kindness and friendship.
 We pray for the wounded and the bereaved,

that in their trials they may know your love and support.

Most holy and gracious God,
hear our prayers for all who strive for peace and all who fight for justice.
Help us, who today remember the cost of war to work for a better tomorrow;
and as we commend to you lives lost in terror and conflict,
bring us all, in the end, to the peace of your presence;
through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Offertory Prayer

Living God,
today we honour those who, like the woman in the gospel, are motivated by self-giving.
As we do so we give thanks for Jesus who gave his life that we might live.
And we offer these gifts, asking that our lives may be motivated
By such self-giving, in the service of your Kingdom. **Amen**

Blessing

May the peace of God,
the peace brought by Christ's cross,
fill your lives – and, through you, the life of the world.
And may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God,
and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you now and always. **Amen**

Suggested Hymns

	RS	CH4	StF	MP
God is our refuge and our strength (Psalm 46)	691	36	810	
God shall endure for aye (Psalm 9)		6		
Behold the mountain of the Lord	130	715		
For the healing of the nations	620	706	696	
O God our help in ages past	705	161	132	498
God the omnipotent king		266		
God forgave my sin (Freely, freely...)			424	181
Peace is flowing like a river				554
It is God Who Holds the Nations		705	705	
Healing River of the Spirit		707		
I Have A Dream A Man Once Said		710		
Judge Eternal, Throned in Splendour	626	264		395
Come Now O Prince of Peace		275		
Lord for the Years	603	159	470	428

RS – Rejoice & Sing | CH4 – Church Hymnary 4 | StF – Singing the Faith | MP – Mission Praise