

The Church's prayer for this Sunday

God our refuge and strength,
bring near the day when wars shall cease
and poverty and pain shall end,
that earth may know the peace of heaven,
through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.

Bible readings and reflection for Sunday 8th November 2020

Psalm 70

Hasten, O God, to save me;
come quickly, LORD, to help me.
²May those who want to take my life
be put to shame and confusion;
may all who desire my ruin
be turned back in disgrace.
³May those who say to me, "Aha! Aha!"
turn back because of their shame.
⁴But may all who seek you
rejoice and be glad in you;
may those who long for your saving help always say,
"The LORD is great!"
⁵But as for me, I am poor and needy;
come quickly to me, O God.
You are my help and my deliverer;
LORD, do not delay.

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit. As it was in the beginning is now and shall be for ever. Amen.

Today's reading from the Epistles: 1 John 3: 11, 14-18

11 For this is the message you heard from the beginning: We should love one another. 14 We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love each other. Anyone who does not love remains in death. 15 Anyone who hates a brother or sister is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life residing in him. ¹⁶This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters. ¹⁷If anyone has material possessions and sees a brother or sister in need but has no pity on them, how can the love of God be in that person? ¹⁸Dear children, let us not love with words or speech but with actions and in truth.

For the word of the Lord, thanks be to God.

Today's reading from the gospels: John 14:23-27

²³ Jesus replied, "Anyone who loves me will obey my teaching. My Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them. ²⁴ Anyone who does not love me will not obey my teaching. These words you hear are not my own; they belong to the Father who sent me.

²⁵ "All this I have spoken while still with you. ²⁶ But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you. ²⁷ Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.

For the word of the Lord, thanks be to God.

A reflection from Canon Alison Myers, Lordsbridge Team Rector and lead minister in Hardwick and Dry Drayton

Jesus said: 'Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.'

Remembering those in war and conflict

Whether you are reading this on Remembrance Sunday or during the following week, this is nevertheless a time of year when we take a moment to remember.

We remember those who lost their lives in past conflicts, including but not limited to those listed on the war memorials in our churches and villages. We remember those, including police and emergency services, who are still risking and losing their lives in the fight against terrorism, in the UK, in Europe and in other places in the world. We remember those who have died overseas as they have helped in holding back the tide of violence to build or sustain a fragile peace.

We remember with thanks those who have given their lives for others in war and conflict, we mourn their passing, and we acknowledge the cost to them and to those who loved them.

We recognise too that this act of remembrance throws into sharp relief the fact that this world is still broken. That there are people in it even now who would rather fight than talk, or if they talk then it is of hate and division rather than of goodness and reconciliation.

Peace hard won

When it comes to war and peace, within the Christian tradition there are those who believe that war is justified in some circumstances even at the cost of the lives of those who will fight, and there are those who believe that it is never justified even at the cost of the lives of those who can't or won't fight. But it is probably true to say that for Christians (and others), whether they fight or don't fight, their actions are ultimately in the cause of peace. True peace is hard won.

When Jesus said 'Peace I leave with you, my peace I give you' he was not referring to an easy peace either. He said those words when he knew that he was destined for death. He knew that the way of

life that he taught, centred on love of God and love for others above all things had brought him into direct opposition those who preferred to live another way and that it would bring his followers into opposition with those people too.

This year, a new frontline

This year, we are also conscious of those who have died on a different frontline, giving their lives in the service of others, in the face of this pandemic. We think particularly of NHS workers but there are also others on other parts of the frontline.

And this year we have learned again that as well as war and terrorism there are other things in this world that, despite the illusion of human control, have the power to hurt us and cause widespread suffering.

Brokenness, resurrection and hope

‘My peace I give you’, Jesus said.

This peace is not defined merely by the absence of conflict or suffering. This peace is offered to us as we stand in the midst of them. This peace Jesus offers is deeply rooted in an understanding of the presence of God’s Spirit alongside us. An understanding that Jesus wept for the brokenness of the world and because he loved it, he died for it and for us.

When Christians pray and worship, and most especially when we share communion, we remember and mourn for the brokenness of the world. But we also remember that brokenness is not the end point. After Jesus died, he rose again. In that ultimate moment of history, he opened up a new life, for the sake of our reconciliation and our healing.

The resurrection demonstrates to us that human failure and inadequacy does not have the last word, and neither do isolation and fear. The resurrection roots us in the understanding that we are not abandoned. The resurrection prods us into recognising that through our actions we have the creative power to call a fresh situation into being¹. It challenges us to consider the potential in where we are, not to write off people or situations which we feel are too difficult or damaged. The Christian hope gives us a vision of a saved world which generates impatience with the evil, oppression and fear that spoils the world as it is now. The theologian Moltmann writes: ‘those who hope in Christ can no longer put up with reality as it is... for the goad of the promised future stabs inexorably into the flesh of every unfulfilled present’². Hope empowers us into solidarity with the groaning creation, to persist in the struggle to renew all things, to be new in all things.

Sometimes this hope is gentle, sometimes a searing flame. This hope somewhere inside that says that what we have now is not all there is. This hope enables us to believe that change is possible, that life can be renewed. This hope doesn’t remove the sadness or the need to endure, instead it is found amongst these things.

Today as we remember those who have died in the service of others in the brokenness of our world, we also remember hope. And perhaps we hear Jesus voice saying to us again: ‘Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.’

¹ Mackintosh quoted in Fiddes, Past Event and Present Salvation

² Moltmann, The Theology of Hope, quoted in Migliore, Faith Seeking Understanding.