

Dorset South & West. Written Service.
Sunday 12th November Remembrance Sunday
'Choose this day whom you will serve?'
Prepared by Revd Jean Quick



Call to Worship: What does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God? Micah 6.8

As you make use of this service you will no doubt want to hold a moment of silent reflection. This might be at 11:00am or a different time. Please use this prayer to guide your reflection and time of silence.

We meet in the presence of God. We commit ourselves to work in penitence and faith for reconciliation between the nations, that all people may, together, live in freedom, justice and peace. We pray for all who in bereavement, disability and pain continue to suffer the consequences of fighting and terror. We remember with thanksgiving and sorrow those whose lives, in world wars and conflicts past and present, have been given and taken away.

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.

Silence is kept.

Everliving God, we remember those who you have gathered from the storm of war into the peace of your presence; may that same peace calm our fears, bring justice to all peoples and establish harmony among the nations, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Heavenly Father, as we grieve for those who have sacrificed their lives in so many wars, we thank you for the greatest sacrifice of all - your Son Jesus. Help us to live in the power of the resurrection today and every day. **Amen.**

STF 132

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.

Bible Reading Joshua 24: 1-3a, 14-25.

The Tribes Renew the Covenant

Then Joshua gathered all the tribes of Israel to Shechem, and summoned the elders, the heads, the judges, and the officers of Israel; and they presented themselves before God. And Joshua said to all the people, 'Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel: Long ago your ancestors—Terah and his sons Abraham and Nahor—lived beyond the Euphrates and served other gods. Then I took your father Abraham from beyond the River and led him through all the land of Canaan and made his offspring many. I gave him Isaac; 'Now therefore revere the Lord, and serve him in sincerity and in faithfulness; put away the gods that your ancestors served beyond the River and in Egypt, and serve the Lord. Now if you are unwilling to serve the Lord, choose this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your ancestors served in the region beyond the River or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you are living; but as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord.'

Then the people answered, 'Far be it from us that we should forsake the Lord to serve other gods; for it is the Lord our God who brought us and our ancestors up from the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery, and who did those great signs in our sight. He protected us along all the way that we went, and among all the peoples through whom we passed; and the Lord drove out before us all the peoples, the Amorites who lived in the land. Therefore we also will serve the Lord, for he is our God.'

But Joshua said to the people, 'You cannot serve the Lord, for he is a holy God. He is a jealous God; he will not forgive your transgressions or your sins. If you forsake the Lord and serve foreign gods, then he will turn and do you harm, and consume you, after having done you good.' And the people said to Joshua, 'No, we will serve the Lord!' Then Joshua said to the people, 'You are witnesses against yourselves that you have chosen the Lord, to serve him.' And they said, 'We are witnesses.' He said, 'Then put away the foreign gods that are among you, and incline your hearts to the Lord, the God of Israel.' The people said to Joshua, 'The Lord our God we will serve, and him we will obey.' So Joshua made a covenant with the people that day, and made statutes and ordinances for them at Shechem.

Reflection:

When we think of all the conflicts going on in our world today wouldn't it be wonderful if the words we have just read could be applied and be as effective? If we could bring together all the warring tribes and factions and ask them to choose the way of the Lord. What is that way? Our call to Worship spelt out the way of the Lord: 'to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God.'

Joshua also told the people to 'put away foreign Gods'. We might ask, "what do people fight over? What are these foreign gods?" It's something that has become so important that it has driven out all that makes us seek to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with our God. Something has become the all consuming passion, or God, no matter the consequences.

We know how easily we can be tempted with those vices that dehumanise us. Greed, envy, hatred and so on. Often it is because something fairly trivial has happened and we have allowed it to fester. Unlike the grain of sand that irritates the oyster shell and yet develops into a beautiful pearl. The specks that cause the irritation in humans can become something so gross and bitter.

In February 2022, Putin again claimed that Ukrainians and Russians are one people. A beautiful thought maybe? However he sees Ukrainians and Russians as brother nations and says that because Russia is the older brother, it should get to be in charge. There's the nub, which raises questions about the brotherhood Putin envisions.

In Russia, the people had no say about whether to invade. Many are protesting against it. Many families have both Russian and Ukrainians members. Because of this, a lot of people on both sides of the border do not want to fight a war against each other. We watch the war between Russia and the Ukraine and feel heartbroken for the atrocities committed and all because the values of humanity are being undermined by what seems to be, one man's twisted beliefs and desires.

We hear of the escalating war between Israel and Palestine. How awful to be witnessing such horrors in a place where we recall Christ's ultimate sacrifice for our salvation, our peace and joy.

Today on this Remembrance Sunday we recall far too many conflicts and battles in the past and still continuing. An online search revealed that there are 32 ongoing conflicts in the world right now, ranging from drug wars, terrorist insurgencies, ethnic conflicts, and civil wars. Just two examples of these are:

Mexico has been engaged in a drug war for several decades, with various drug cartels and criminal organisations vying for power and control of the lucrative drug trade. This conflict has resulted in widespread violence, corruption, and human rights abuses, with tens of thousands of people killed or disappeared.

Yemen is currently facing a complex and multi-faceted conflict, involving multiple parties including the government, Houthi rebels, and various other armed groups. The conflict began in 2014 when the Houthis seized control of the capital city of Sana'a, and has since escalated into a full-blown civil war, exacerbated by regional and international rivalries. The humanitarian situation in Yemen is dire, with millions of people facing famine, disease, and displacement as a result of the conflict.

However it's all too easy to look over the world's walls and at how others have lost all sense of living in kindness and chosen a perverse way of justice. We need to ask, what conflicts are in our own perimeters?

What 'foreign gods' have got into our perception of life? I am sure we have at all times had that awful experience of getting a foreign body in one of our eyes. A speck of dust, a fly or fallen eyelash. How quickly we want it removed and the pain and soreness gone, especially so that we can see clearly again. How sad when we allow those awful words to be resident in our hearts, "I might forgive but I will never forget". The bitter memories just go on hurting, dividing and destroying our peace and our perception of the world. Not in any shape or form reflecting the love of God to us and to all people. The book of Joshua tells us about the people's preparation to enter into the promised land and at the end of the reading today we see that they entered into a new covenant. A covenant to serve God and live according to His ways.

Today on this Sunday so close to the 11th November, we commemorate Remembrance Day. This was the day 1918 at 11:00 a.m. which formally brought to an end the hostilities of World War One. It was H.G. Wells, who, in 1914, wrote an article entitled, "The War to End All War". This was to be that turning point in history; the realisation that war needed to cease, and that a new world order needed to be established; an order based on peace and reconciliation, on justice and equality and that war should come to an end.

This was to be our new covenant. Well, as we all know, we failed to live up to these ideals and continue to fail. Indeed, in the Paris Peace Conference in 1919, Field-Marshal Earl Wavell said despondently "After the 'war to end war', they seem to have been pretty successful in Paris at making the 'Peace to end Peace'.

We continue to live in a troubled world where ironically war is still our major instrument for security and peace, and men and women continually lay down their lives for this ideal.

Today, we are called to remember; but I believe we do an injustice to those who served and sacrificed their lives, if it is only war that we remember, for that is a soldier's and a nation's worst enemy. They, we, all long for peace. So, perhaps as Joshua looked over the Promised Land and asked the people to choose how they would live, we need to look at our globe and do the same. And, just as they made a covenant, perhaps we need to as well; A Covenant of Peace.

And what might it look like? Perhaps, it might begin with the Creation Story and that all are made in the image of God. Then, we could link that to the words of Paul . . . "In Christ there is no Greek or Jew, male or female, slave or free." How different would this world be if we could remove such words as "racism" and "bigotry" and "sexism" from our vocabulary? How different we all would be if we looked for the intrinsic value of every human life, regardless of distinction, for, indeed, human distinction and diversity should add value to life and not diminish it in any way.

And maybe another element of this "Peace Covenant" could be found in the words of Jesus about loving our neighbour and loving even those who don't love you back. You see, there is nothing noble about loving those who love you, nothing uniquely faith based about being nice to those who are nice to us; nothing Christian about caring for those who care for you. Indeed, the radical element of faith as Jesus says in Luke 6 is, "Bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you. If someone takes your coat, do not withhold your shirt from them."

Now, these words may seem extreme to most, and I don't believe Jesus was advocating allowing others to walk over us. But I do believe he was saying that it is up to us to make that first move and then the second and even the third, to try and break down barriers between peoples; to model forgiveness and work toward reconciliation first on a local level, and then beyond.

A Covenant of Peace on a day set aside to remember the end of "The War That Was to End All Wars". Of course we cannot control global affairs, but perhaps if we all do our part, we may know greater peace within our families, our church, our city, our nation. May it all begin, on this, our Remembrance Sunday, with us choosing how we will live, how we will give and how we will forgive.

"Choose this day", Joshua said to the people; choose what is important to you, choose how important God's way is in your life and then commit yourselves to it. Make a covenant with God, a Covenant of Peace that you seek to live by and live by your choices. That is what Joshua was asking of the people of Israel, overlooking the Promised Land, he says to the people, choose this day what is important to you. Choose and then live by your choices.

STF 131. (Can be sung to the tune Scarlet ribbons or STF 503 love divine tune Blaenwern)

By a monument of marble,
or a simple wooden cross,
here we gather to remember
sacrifice and tragic loss.
Blood-red poppy petals flutter,
each a symbol for a life,
drifting in a crimson curtain,
shadow of our constant strife.

Solemn silence now surrounds us
as we stand in memory.
Why must factions stir up conflict?
This eternal mystery

troubles hearts and stirs the conscience,
urges us to think again;
face the curse of confrontation,
yet reduce this searing pain.

For the sound of war still thunders
through our planet, on this day.
Every hour new victims suffer,
even as we meet to pray.
God, we need your help and guidance
in our constant search for peace.
Move us on to new solutions
as we pray that wars may cease.

Prayers of Intercession:

Let us pray for all who suffer as a result of conflict, and ask that God may give us peace: for the service men and women who have died in the violence of war, each one remembered by and known to God;

May God give peace. God give peace.

For those who love them in death as in life, offering the distress of our grief and the sadness of our loss;

May God give peace. God give peace.

For all members of the armed forces who are in danger this day, remembering family, friends and all who pray for their safe return;

May God give peace. God give peace.

For civilian women, children and men whose lives are disfigured by war or terror, calling to mind in penitence the anger and hatreds of humanity;

May God give peace. God give peace.

For peacemakers and peacekeepers, who seek to keep this world secure and free;

May God give peace. God give peace.

For all who bear the burden and privilege of leadership, political, military and religious; asking for gifts of wisdom and resolve in the search for reconciliation and peace;

May God give peace. God give peace.

O God of truth and justice, we hold before you those whose memory we cherish, and those whose names we will never know. Help us to lift our eyes above the torment of this broken world, and grant us the grace to pray for those who wish us harm. As we honour the past, may we put our faith in your future; for you are the source of life and hope, now and for ever. **Amen.**

The Lord's Prayer

StF 517

Eternal Father, strong to save,
whose arm doth bind the restless wave,
who bidd'st the mighty ocean deep
its own appointed limits keep:

O hear us when we cry to thee
for those in peril on the sea.

O Saviour, whose almighty word
the winds and waves submissive heard,
who walked upon the foaming deep,
and calm amid its rage didst sleep:

O sacred Spirit, who didst brood
upon the chaos dark and rude,
who made its angry tumult cease,
and gavest light and life and peace:

O Trinity of love and power,
shield all who sail in danger's hour;
from rock and tempest, fire and foe,
protect them wheresoe'er they go:

and ever let there rise to thee
glad hymns of praise from land and sea.

An Act of Commitment

Let us pledge ourselves anew to the service of God and our fellow men and women: that we may help, encourage and comfort others, and support those working for the relief of the needy and for the peace and welfare of the nations.

Lord God our Father, we pledge ourselves to serve you and all humankind, in the cause of peace, for the relief of want and suffering, and for the praise of your name. Guide and bless us by your Spirit; give us wisdom; give us courage; give us hope; and keep us faithful now and always. **Amen.**