

Ninth Sunday after Pentecost

Ninth Sunday after Pentecost – 11 August 2019

The Church would like to thank members of the Asia Committee of the World Mission Council for their thoughts on the ninth Sunday after Pentecost.

Introduction – Peacebuilding and Reconciliation	2
Scripture passages	3
Isaiah 1:1, 10-20	4
Psalm 50:1-8, 22-23	4
Hebrews 11:1-3, 8	4
Luke 12:32-40.....	5
Some additional reading	5
Sermon ideas	6
Case Study 1: Sri Lanka	6
Case Study 2: South Korea.....	7
Case Study 3: Nepal.....	9
Case Study 4: Pakistan.....	10
Time with children	11
Prayers for justice and peace.....	12
Musical suggestions	15

Introduction – Peacebuilding and Reconciliation

Today's reflections have been developed by members of the Asia Committee of the World Mission Council. The theme of the WMC Report to the 2019 General Assembly was based on the themes of our Strategic Plan – Presence (Being), Practical Action (Doing), and Proclamation (Saying). Clearly this is a broad topic and benefits from being narrowed down. In 1988 the World Council of Churches has designated the Sunday before 15 August as a common day of prayer for peace, and therefore the committee has decided to focus on the core themes of peacebuilding and reconciliation, which have ongoing relevance across the world.

Last year there was a strong focus on our engagement with our partner churches in Korea, and we are delighted about the positive responses that have been seen there over the last year.

This year it is hoped to broaden the scope of our reflection, and that by listening to some stories emerging from Sri Lanka, Nepal, South Korea and Pakistan, readers will gain a greater understanding of the complexity and challenges involved in peace-making. By identifying alternative patterns of peace-making, readers may be able to wrestle anew with their own context, interests and concerns.

The lectionary readings naturally provoke many thoughts and can be creatively developed in a variety of ways:

- Isaiah 1: 1, 10-20: Having a vision, strengthens and guides people, especially in times of uncertainty and chaos.
- Psalm 50: 1-8, 22-23: God is not silent, and God makes fierce demands.
- Hebrews 11: 1-3, 8-16: Faith inspires new journeys, and new lives; faith is enjoying having a hopeful imagination.
- Luke 12: 32-40: Spiritual living is being alert, moving in the flow, and being constantly ready to light our lamps.

Scripture passages

The group has wrestled with each passage, using a template which opens up horizons for insight and understanding. Derived from Jane Leach and Michael Paterson's *Pastoral Supervision: A Handbook* (2010, 36-41), the 'three levels of seeing' template also informs Ewan Kelly and Michael Paterson's innovative work, *Values Based Reflective Practice* (VBRP), which is widely used within healthcare chaplaincy (Paterson, M. and Kelly, E. 2013 *Reflective Practice: a method developed for healthcare chaplains in Scotland. Practical Theology* 6(1): 51-68).

The template is based on the three levels of seeing in John 20, reflected in three different Greek words, *blepo*, I see, *theoreo*, I wonder, and *horao*, I understand. Each word represents a deeper level of insight.

Three levels of insight:

1. On the surface: **I see it just as it is.** 'I see' is the first level of seeing and works with the incontrovertible, the facts of the matter. I see what is right there before my eyes in the biblical text. Sometimes we can neglect this level of seeing since it appears to be too simple and offends the need to appear sophisticated. Being able to state the obvious can result in a breakthrough of insight.
2. Curiosity: **'Wondering'** is the second level of seeing and focuses on whatever arouses curiosity. Stories provoke our imagination and cause us to wonder and to turn things over in our minds. Wondering is not the same as interpreting. Whereas interpretation tells people what they should be thinking, and constricts the imagination, wondering opens horizons and enlarges the space for exploration.
3. Depth of insight: **'I understand'**, I get it now, is the third level of seeing and focuses on making connections between the biblical text and living out one's faith. It's about making connections between biblical texts, experiences, self, values, wisdom and God. It looks for the penny to drop, for things to fall into place, the fog to lift and clarity to dawn. Realising the impact of the biblical text on faithful practice lies at the heart of this method.

[Isaiah 1:1, 10-20](#)

I see: This is Isaiah's vision of what the Lord is saying to rebellious children – how futile are your rituals and your offerings! Change your ways, learn to do good, seek justice, rescue the orphan, and plead for the widow.

I wonder: Whether without a vision of peace and reconciliation, we lose our way, lose our hope and become distant from God.

I understand: The fierce demands of faith, which may require us to change our lifestyle.

[Psalm 50:1-8, 22-23](#)

I see: From the rising of the sun to its setting God speaks, God is not silent. God makes strong demands of the people to go the right way.

I wonder: How do we hold on to faith when God seems to be silent?

I understand: Once more God speaks out, and makes demands for people to live the right way.

[Hebrews 11:1-3, 8](#)

I see: Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. The faith of Abraham took him on a journey into the unknown, and gifted Sarah their son, and so began the story of God's people who are, 'as many as the stars of heaven, and as the innumerable grains of sand by the seashore'.

I wonder: What happens when we lose faith, or confidence, or trust and go our own way?

I understand: Faith is a hopeful imagination.

[Luke 12:32-40](#)

I see: Do not be afraid: your heavenly Father is giving you the kingdom
Where your treasure is, there is your heart
Be ready, be attentive, be prepared for action

I wonder: Where is our treasure?
What is it like to be caught sleeping?
What does it feel like to miss the moment?

I understand: Spiritual living is being alert, moving in the flow, and being constantly ready to light our lamps.

Some additional reading

“The Peace of Wild Things”

When despair for the world grows in me
and I wake in the night at the least sound
in fear of what my life and my children’s lives may be,
I go and lie down where the wood drake
rests in his beauty on the water, and the great heron feeds.
I come into the peace of wild things
who do not tax their lives with forethought
of grief. I come into the presence of still water.
And I feel above me the day-blind stars
waiting with their light. For a time
I rest in the grace of the world, and am free.

Wendell Berry

“I many times thought Peace had come”

I many times thought Peace had come
When Peace was far away—
As Wrecked Men—deem they sight the Land—
At Centre of the Sea—

And struggle slacker—but to prove
As hopelessly as I—
How many the fictitious Shores—
Before the Harbor be—

Emily Dickinson

Sermon ideas

Four stories of peace-making and reconciliation from Asia.

Critical conversations with scripture and the living texts of life are deepened by **insight questions**, scrutinising needs, abilities, values, voices and impact on self.

Case Study 1: Sri Lanka

Sri Lanka. A deceptively beautiful sub-tropical island in the Indian Ocean, popular with tourists and investors alike. Between 1983 and 2009 this country was gripped by a violent civil war as secular Tamils fought the majority Sinhalese in a bid to create their own homeland. Up to 100,000 civilians, mainly Tamils, were killed and 50,000 fighters on both sides. Communities were uprooted, people fled the country, child soldiers were recruited; there was brutality on both sides.

Background

Tamils and Sinhalese suffered. Hindus, Muslims, Buddhists, Christians and those with no faith suffered. People are still looking for children taken away by the army. The brutality of war has undermined traditional cultural and faith values. Girls and women are abused. People feel justice is delayed and denied. Ex-combatants suffer trauma and stigma.

Description

Sashi Stephens and her colleagues at the Women's Development Centre care for victims of abuse and their babies. These victims of violence are given safety, shelter and training or education. They can work at WDC's social enterprise. They and their families receive counselling and mediation but never judgement.

The National Christian Council of Sri Lanka works with communities and individuals across the religious and ethnic divide. The churches and the Christians are learning the importance and the hard work of forgiving and reconciling between Tamil and Sinhala Christians.

Analysis

The National Christian Council of Sri Lanka is only able to work with Buddhists, Hindus and Muslims because of a strong faith in the power of the Gospel that leads to forgiveness. The Women's Development Centre is only able to show love and compassion because it follows Jesus Christ's example.

It is hard work. It depends on building trust with people and communities who may be suspicious, angry or fearful. It means being watched by the security forces. It means working with and getting access to those in power while also holding them to account. It means dealing with setbacks. It means standing beside and speaking for the poor, powerless, and vulnerable of Sri Lanka.

Case Study 2: South Korea

Background

Pamela Gordon participated in the Presbyterian Church in the Republic of Korea Pre-Assembly and attended the 103rd General Assembly. The theme for the Pre-Assembly Partners Consultation was **'Beyond Unification'**.

Description

The opening keynote address was given by Rev Dr Kim Hiheon, who is pastor of a church in Seoul. He started his speech telling us about Korean Minjung, or People's theology, which emerged from South Korean Christians struggling for social justice. Dr Kim expressed his sorrow that Korean churches had lost their prophetic voice and instead adopted a Prosperity Gospel.

(Prosperity Gospel is otherwise known as the Health and Wealth gospel. It is believed that it is the will of God that some people are richly blessed both financially and physically. To donate money to religious causes will increase your own wealth. If humans have faith in God, they will be granted security and prosperity by God.)

As this was an ecumenical event, Rev Dr Kim proposed strengthening ties between the denominations around the world to bring back the prophetic calling and weave in a network of peace and to develop new ways of using these relationships in international mission.

- In Korea, we have traces of hope for reconciliation – sharing a flag at the PyeongChang Winter Olympics and the Olympic Truce.
- The summit meeting between President Moon Je-in and Kim Jong-un in April.
- High level discussions with Mike Pompeo and a potential meeting with President Trump.

In the second session, Miss Koh Wan Sun, now 80 years old, was a survivor of the 1948 Jeju Uprising, also known as Jeju 4.3. The name refers to 3 April 1948, when police shot and killed six anti-government protestors, which marked the beginning of a crackdown that only ended six years later. An estimated 20-30,000 people were killed, almost all of whom were civilians. People were forbidden from talking about the uprising and it was only acknowledged by the Government in 2000.

Jeju 4.3 peace park has the names of 14,000 victims inscribed on stone tablets. The most poignant and disturbing sculpture that Pamela Gordon saw during her visit was of a woman and her baby, who were supposedly found frozen to death as they tried to escape and hide from government forces;

Analysis

Theologian, Jurgen Moltmann, gave a lecture on Reconciliation, Peace and Hope, where he spoke about the church's role in the reunification of Germany and encouraged Korean churches to play a similar role on the Korean Peninsula. For the people living in South Korea, a phrase that is often used to describe how it feels to live under a foreign-controlled military lifestyle is "fake peace".

What does peace mean and what does the peace of Christ mean for North and South Korea? What does it mean for us as part of the worldwide church? The division of Korea – and the suspended but unresolved state of war – is itself the root cause and rationale for ongoing military confrontation, the arms race and the production of nuclear weapons in the region. Therefore we must remove the unresolved conflict and division as a source of tension and confrontation.

As Christians we are called to pursue a kind of peace that is genuine, understanding and respectful of other people's opinions, even though we may not agree with them.

We want peace. We can say nice things about peace but we need to make a sacrifice to bring about peace. Talking about peace is easy but to bring it about is difficult. One reason it is difficult is because we tend to look to the other person or country to bring about peace, when in fact it can mean looking at ourselves and letting peace begin with us as individuals.

What does peace entail? Ultimately it means no longer being at war, but how do we practise peace? We stop retaliation. We unclench our fists to shake hands. We forgive and do not carry out revenge, so that peace may govern.

As we see in the news, peace between North and South Korea won't happen right away. However it is not passive, it is a call to action: to be self-controlled, disciplined and active.

In Jesus we see **an activist of peace**. He said, "Peace I leave with you." He sat with enemies around tables to bring peace. Our enemies need peace. We can be active in offering it by talking TO our enemies, not ABOUT our enemies.

Case Study 3: Nepal

Background

Nepal is a diverse and proud country, never colonised but squeezed between the Asian giants India and China. Known as the Hermit Kingdom until it opened to outsiders in the 1950s, Nepal is a popular tourist destination for climbers and trekkers and an exporter of labour to the Gulf and South East Asia. Nepal, where 80% of the 30 million population is Hindu, celebrates that it is the birthplace of Lord Buddha. A young country where half the population is aged 25 or under, it has made significant strides in improving the health and education of the people, yet much remains to be done. The country is still scarred and recovering from the decade-long Maoist insurgency that ended 2006 with loss of at least 12,000 lives and ten times as many displaced.

Description

The Church of Scotland was one of the 12 agencies that founded United Mission to Nepal (UMN) in 1954. Sixty-five years on we are still involved and give thanks that one of our mission partners, Joel Hafvenstein, is the Executive Director.

UMN works to improve the lives of the poorest people and communities through working with local community based organisations, government institutions and others in the fields of health, education, livelihoods, peacebuilding, and good governance. All this work is done in a way that reflects and upholds Christian values.

In response to the 2015 earthquakes, Church of Scotland's Let Us Build a House campaign raised £500,000 from congregations and presbyteries towards rebuilding devastated communities in Dhading. UMN's response has resulted in 572 stone masons trained to build earthquake-resilient houses and schools; building five earthquake-resistant demonstration houses and 14 schools; repairing 38km of footpaths and 15km of roads, rebuilding eight footbridges across rivers; planting over 22,000 trees, rehabilitating five drinking water systems with a further 8 underway, which benefits 280 families and 4,260 schoolchildren; bringing 15 micro-hydroelectricity plants back online to power rice mills and sawmills. The list goes on and includes training for farmers and community groups, microfinance for small businesses, and help for people to get proper documentation and registration so they can access government services.

There were only a few hundred Christians in Nepal in the 1950s, today there are thought to be more than a million. This fast-growing church needs well-trained pastors and ministers, so Church of Scotland also partners with and supports Nepal Ebenezer Bible College in Kathmandu. More Christians now understand the need to live out their faith and want to

understand what Christian responses are to justice and peace, reconciliation, care for creation and the environment, sex and relationships.

Analysis

UMN's work is inspired by the love and teaching of Jesus Christ. Following Jesus' example, UMN does not discriminate on the basis of religion when it comes to people who benefit from programmes we support, but aim to work with the poorest and most marginalised communities, regardless of their religious faith.

Case Study 4: Pakistan

'Advocacy against the misuse of the Blasphemy Law in Pakistan'

Background

CLAAS have produced a short video on Pakistan's Blasphemy Law, available here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qKUsY5DY1Q4>

Introduced during the colonial era to protect people of all faiths, amendments made to Pakistan's Blasphemy Law in the 1980s and 1990s have made non-Muslim minorities especially vulnerable. Accusations of blasphemy, which is now a capital offence, are often used to settle scores or grab property. The misuse of the law has led to mob violence and vigilante revenge. People accused of blasphemy and their families have been killed, forced to go into hiding or even exile. In 2011 two leading politicians were assassinated for voicing criticisms of the law and their support for one victim, Asia Bibi, who was wrongly accused of blasphemy in 2009 and convicted the following year. After eight years on death row she was acquitted in 2018 and was eventually able to leave the country in May this year. Others are still in custody, either charged or convicted of blasphemy.

Description

In 1992 The Church of Pakistan and the Roman Catholic Church established an NGO, Centre for Legal Aid, Assistance, and Settlement (CLAAS) to support people accused of blasphemy, victims of abduction and forced conversion to Islam, and other disputes. Based in Lahore, CLAAS has a team of lawyers and paralegal staff who research incidents, represent defendants in court, and run two safe-houses. A sister organisation in London, CLAAS UK, runs advocacy and lobbies the government to use its influence with the Pakistan authorities against the misuse of the blasphemy law.

Analysis

A delegation from Church of Scotland visited CLAAS in Lahore. They were both moved and uplifted by women performing drama and dance, used as part of the therapy and counselling process. One said, “It was harrowing to listen to these women, and to see one young woman still bearing the scars of an acid attack. But it was an immense privilege to be invited to meet these women and a huge responsibility to know we would go back and share their stories. These women had suffered so much but they had so much dignity.”

Time with children

Becoming a peacemaker: Peace Babies – by The Rev Alan M Barker

Aims: To celebrate peace and peace-making.

Preparation and materials

- a packet of Bassett’s Jelly Babies.
- display the words from Matthew 5.9: “Happy are **those who work for peace: God will call them his children!**”

Assembly

1. Produce the packet of Jelly Babies. Identify the different colours and flavours: strawberry, lime, blackcurrant, lemon, raspberry, and orange. Which are most popular? You could conduct a quick opinion poll.
2. Explain that ‘Jelly Babies’ were first launched in 1918 to celebrate the end of the First World War. They were called ‘Peace Babies’ and quickly became popular. During the Second World War production ceased because of a shortage of ingredients. They were ‘reborn’ in 1953, renamed ‘Jelly Babies’.
3. Invite the children to consider why the sale of Jelly Babies was a good way to celebrate peace. Reflect that the Peace Babies marked a new beginning (babies). They showed that life was returning to normal and could be fun again (jelly sweet).
4. Explain that in 1989 each of the six ‘babies’ was given a name and an identity. Refer to the illustrations and descriptions on the Bassett’s packaging. Pink Baby Bonny wears a nappy and frilly bonnet. She is always crawling into mischief! Boofuls is soft-hearted and cries a lot, even when he is happy! Bumper is orange, wears a bum-bag, and bumps into things! Bubbles has her hair in a ponytail and is yellow. Bigheart is grey and always puts his friends first. Brilliant is the red leader of the gang.

5. Peace is enjoyed when people of different ages, interests and appearances live together in harmony. (Wouldn't a bag of jelly babies be dull if the sweets were all one colour and flavour!)
6. Suggest that there's a sense in which we all can be 'Peace Babies'. Display this saying of Jesus:

“Happy are those who work for peace: God will call them His children!” (Matthew 5.9, Good News Bible)

Invite everyone to consider how they can 'work for peace'. You may wish to record the suggestions using different coloured pens. Some ideas might include: trying to listen and learn from other people instead of arguing; counting to ten before responding; finding out about different ways of living.

Refer back to the bag of sweets. Working for peace doesn't mean being soft (like a jelly baby). It calls for a strong commitment to friendship, fairness, being ready to share, and celebrating the good things of life together.

Pass the sweets around and invite everyone to enjoy a peace baby!

Prayers for justice and peace

Opening responses

O God, who called all life into being,
the earth, sea and sky are Yours
Your presence is all around us,
every atom is full of Your energy
Your spirit enlivens all who walk the earth,
with her we yearn for justice to be done
For creation to be freed from bondage,
for the hungry to be fed
For captives to be released,
for Your kingdom of peace to come to earth.

Approach and confession

O God, You are always true to us in love
And we are left wanting to say sorry
For our faithlessness to You and to one another,
For our forgetting of the poor and broken
For our failure to cherish creation
Give us life, O God, to change
And enable us to change, that we may live.

Adoration

Affirmation of faith

In the midst of hunger and war
we celebrate the promise of plenty and peace.
In the midst of oppression and tyranny
we celebrate the promise of service and freedom.
In the midst of doubt and despair
we celebrate the promise of faith and hope.
In the midst of fear and betrayal
we celebrate the promise of joy and loyalty.
In the midst of hatred and death
we celebrate the promise of love and life.
In the midst of sin and decay
we celebrate the promise of salvation and renewal.
In the midst of death on every side
we celebrate the promise of the living Christ.

Some prayers of concern

God of all creation who has come to us in Jesus,
Lead us in Your way of love and fill us with Your Spirit
Choose us to bring good news to the poor,
to proclaim liberty to the captives,
to bring sight to the blind and set free the oppressed.
So shall Your new creation come and Your will be done

Spirit of truth and judgment who alone
can cast out the powers that grip our world
At the point of crisis, give us Your discernment,
That we may accurately name what is evil
And know the way that leads to peace.

Spirit of integrity, You drive us into the desert to search out truth.
Give us the clarity to know what is right,
that we may abandon the false innocence of failing to choose at all
but may follow the purpose of Jesus Christ.

God of history, You share our joys and crushing sorrows.
You hear the cries of the afflicted, You fill the hungry and You set free the oppressed.
We pray for the end to all injustice.
Inspire us with the all-embracing love of God
Challenge us with the sacrificial love of Jesus
Empower us with the transforming love of the Spirit
That we and all God's children may live and be free.

Closing responses

A blessing on you who are poor,

Yours is the kingdom of God.

A blessing on you who mourn,

You shall be comforted.

A blessing on you who hunger for justice,

You shall be satisfied.

A blessing on you who make peace,

You shall be called children of God.

A blessing on you who are persecuted
for the cause of the right,

Yours is the Kingdom of heaven.

Or

God, lead us, that we may stand firm in faith for justice

Teach us love. Teach us compassion.

Above all, out of love and compassion, teach us to act.

Amen

Blessing

May the God who shakes heaven and earth

Whom heaven could not contain,

Who lives to disturb and heal us,

Bless you with power to go forth and proclaim the gospel.

Amen

(The above prayers are taken from *Iona Abbey Worship Book* (2001), 73-87 @WGWG.

We shift for a moment to another area of the world, the Middle East, where the need for justice and peace is so evident. The final prayer is taken from Sabeel, in Jerusalem. The Sabeel Ecumenical Liberation Theology Centre in Jerusalem has produced a contemporary way of the cross, a liturgical journey along the Palestinian Via Dolorosa. By doing so it is making connections between the inscriptions on the walls of the Old City, reminding us where Jesus falls under the weight of the cross, over and over again, with the life experiences of the Palestinian communities, where images of refugee camps, martyrs, graffiti, are the backcloth of calls to action and cries of pain. It is well worth a look to inspire an Easter reflection. Here is an opening prayer from this text.

Sabeel Prayer

Merciful and loving God, we give You thanks for the many blessings
You have so generously given us.

Thank You for Your presence and guidance
as we walk the way of peace.

Bless the work of Sabeel and its friends, local and international.
Guide its ecumenical, interfaith and justice ministries.

Grant us all the courage to confront oppression.

Strengthen our commitment to the work of justice, peace
and reconciliation among all people and especially between Palestinians and Israelis.

Help us to see Your image in each other.

Empower us to stand up for truth and to respect the dignity of every human being.

And to You alone be glory and honour now and forever. Amen.

Musical suggestions

You can listen to samples of these suggestions in the 'Weekly Worship' section of <https://music.churchofscotland.org.uk/>. This new online music resource will allow you to listen to and search the breadth of music available in the Church Hymnary 4th edition (CH4).

You will find hidden gems and alternative arrangements to familiar songs that will inspire creativity and spark fresh curiosity about how we best use music in worship.

- CH4 39 – “God the Lord, the king almighty” – a musical setting of psalm 50
- CH4 132 – “Immortal invisible God only wise” – links with the Hebrews passage and the theme, ‘faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen’
- CH4 253 – “Inspired by love and anger”
- CH4 275 – “Come now O Prince of Peace” – an Asian gem
- CH4 360 – “Jesus Christ is waiting” – captures the call and activities of faith
- CH4 527 – “Lord make us servants of your peace” (O waly waly)
- CH4 528 – “Make me a channel of your peace” – the well-known Prayer of St Francis of Assisi
- CH4 707 – “Healing river of the Spirit” – lovely lyrics by Ruth C Duck
- CH4 715 – “Behold the mountain of the Lord” – often sung on Remembrance Sunday, using the imagery ‘to ploughshares men shall beat their swords, to pruning hooks their spears

Spirituals

- Down by the riverside: “I’m gonna lay down my sword and shield”
- Oh Freedom: “Oh freedom, oh freedom, oh freedom over me”

Iona songs

- Sent by the Lord am I
- Kindle a flame
- Heaven shall not wait

You are free to download, project, print and circulate multiple copies of any of this material for use in worship services, bible studies, parish magazines, etc., but reproduction for commercial purposes is not permitted.

Please note that the views expressed in these materials are those of the individual writer and not necessarily the official view of the Church of Scotland, which can be laid down only by the General Assembly.