

## **Fifteenth Sunday after Pentecost**

### **Fifteenth Sunday after Pentecost – 22 September 2019**

The Church would like to thank Rt Revd Trevor Williams, former Bishop of Limerick and Killaloe and former leader of Corrymeela Community, for his thoughts on the fifteenth Sunday after Pentecost, which follows the UN International Day of Peace.

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## Corrymeela

Corrymeela is Northern Ireland's oldest peace and reconciliation organisation.

We began before "The Troubles" and continue on in Northern Ireland's changing post-conflict society. The organisation grew organically from the original community members, and today almost 40 full-time staff and dozens of volunteers work alongside the 11,000 people who spend time in our residential centre every year.

We are also a dispersed Christian Community, and many community members volunteer regularly at the residential centre in Ballycastle. Our work is made possible by around 80,000 volunteer hours every year.

Many of our volunteers have been working on the site for decades, generously giving time and service to the work. The Community of Corrymeela has grown too, with 150 members, 50 associate members and thousands of friends around the globe. Together we make commitments to be engaged with the world at its points of fracture, faith and potential.

We are teachers, writers, people looking for work, retired people; we are young, middle-aged and old; we are people of doctrine and people of question. We are people who seek to engage with the differences of our world. We are people who disagree with each other on matters of religion, politics and economics. We are people who wish to name our own complicity in the fractures that damage our societies. We are people of dedication and commitment. We are people of prayers, conversation, curiosity and questioning. We are people of truth-telling and hope. We are Corrymeela. And you are always welcome.

## UN International Day of Peace

In 1981 the United Nations General Assembly inaugurated the International Day of Peace to encourage everyone around the world to commit themselves to keeping peace. Their hope was the day would assist in building a culture of peace that would last for generations to come.

The need for peace is undeniable. "Violence and conflict affects almost one fifth of the world's population, that is 1.5 billion people. The war in Syria has contributed to the highest number of displaced people since World War 11, nearly five million having fled its bombs and bullets. One in every 122 people is now a refugee, internally displaced or seeking asylum and the cost of world military spending is said to be nearly 250 times more

than is spent on peace building.” (<https://www.christianaid.ie/resources/about-us/tackling-violence-building-peace-global-strategy-2016>)

The scriptures clearly prioritise peace building as central to our Christian discipleship. When we work for peace we reflect God’s essential character – ‘Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God’ (Matthew 5.43) – and participate in God’s work of salvation who through Christ ‘was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or heaven, by making peace through the blood of the cross’ (Colossians 1:19).

By reflecting the priority of peace building in our worship today we renew a central commitment as followers of Jesus Christ.

### **Amos 8:4-7**

Amos lived at a time of unusual stability and prosperity under the reign of Jeroboam 11. The great enemy, Damascus, had been defeated by the Assyrians around 800 BCE, allowing Israel to expand its territories. But what happened? Inequality increased and filled the space created by prosperity – the rich became even more powerful and the poor were further impoverished.

In marking International Day of Peace 2019, the context may have changed, but systems of exploitation remain the same. Injustice is more than a personal matter of doing right or wrong, it is also a systemic issue. Amos condemns both the personal actions and the systems of trade that trample on the poor, where a person may be sold into slavery for the cost of a pair of sandals. Amos observes that even the religious observance of the sabbath – a blessing to the poor to give rest to those in danger of exploitation – is seen as an inconvenient barrier to making profit; weights, measures and currency are fiddled to exploit the ill-informed, who were unaware that the ephah and shekel had different values in different countries, and the sweepings of the wheat, that by law should be left for the poor to glean, are used to make further profit for the rich.

Amos presents a God of Justice, demanding a social system that enhances fullness of life that can be enjoyed by all. There can be no peace without justice. Injustice undermines the very basis of peace where the Biblical word for peace, ‘Shalom’, means harmony, wholeness, completeness, prosperity, welfare and tranquility.

Amos challenges us to acknowledge that faith in God cannot be restricted to personal morality but also addresses the systemic structures of domination where the powerful exploit the poor and vulnerable.

## Questions

- Do you think this passage reflects our society's values and priorities?
- What is similar and what is different between what Amos observed and what you see in our world?
- If there are similarities, what does our calling as Christians require you to do?
- What can we do, no matter how small or seemingly insignificant?

## Psalm 113

The Psalms reflect a wide spectrum of human experience, ranging from despair to joy, from lament to praise. As a whole the human emotions expressed in the Psalms move towards praise and this psalm (113) reflects such worship. In reading or reciting (or more appropriately singing) this Psalm we join the procession of God's people praising Yahweh.

The Temple is the usual focus of worship. However, the location for the Praise of God in this psalm is not the Temple, but where Yahweh is seated, on a throne above the heavens. The Psalmist portrays Yahweh as Lord of the Universe, unique and supreme above all other powers and dominions. All centres of influence are under God's control, 'who looks far down on the heavens and the earth'. Ultimately God's will cannot be ignored.

It is the character of God that elicits our praise; God is a merciful and just judge. This is joy for the joyless, hope for the hopeless. God's judgment is based on justice. God is concerned that right relationships (righteousness) are established in the world. So here God is concerned to right wrongs, correcting imbalances of power and privilege and restoring hope to those who are vulnerable and in despair.

The Psalmist has a holistic view of life. The worship of God is intimately related to the quality of our relationships with one another in society. As our love for God grows, so our need to compete with those around us diminishes. Rivalry with others is no longer our primary motivating force, neither is the accumulation of wealth or possessions our passion. By putting God first, we are transformed and freed to love generously our neighbour as ourselves.

This psalm is about praise, but it also shows clearly the path to Peace. The God of Peace, the God of Justice, is Good News for those who suffer injustice.

## Question

- How do Sunday words impact your weekly world?  
So when you are offering your gift at the altar, if you remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother or sister, and then come and offer your gift (Matthew 5:23-24).

## 1 Timothy 2:1-7

The Pastoral Epistles, as the description implies, are full of advice about how to live as Christians in a non-Christian world. How does Christian worship relate to society and the wider world? This passage insists that Christian commitment as expressed in prayer should be inclusive, not restricted to the needs of Church members but committed to the wellbeing of society and our world. This wide vision for all of God's world should direct our prayer, whether it is supplication (*deesis*) – an appeal for a particular need; prayers (*proseuche*) – a general word for prayer of petitions; intercessions (*enteuxis*) – urgent requests; or thanksgiving (*eucharistia*). The writer does not advocate a distancing from the non-Christian world, rather a committed engagement with the needs of the wider world.

The Romans introduced Emperor Worship as a unifying and stabilising force for their Empire. But here the Church is encouraged to pray *for* Kings and those in authority, not *to* those in authority. Hope for Peace and Reconciliation based on God's character, not on the influence of human empires, no matter how powerful they may be. Jesus' self-giving love, even to death on the cross, is the source of hope for the world. This is the character of love that we are called to reflect in a needy world.

This reading does not see the Church as a 'safe haven' from the troubles of the world, rather those concerns are at the heart of the Church's life and worship. Why? Because our calling is to reflect God's love for the world: God 'desires everyone to be saved'.

## Questions

- If we audit our Church commitments, how much are they weighted towards the interests of Church members compared to those in need in our local community?
- Do we reflect God's concern for the whole of creation in the way we order our priorities as a Church?

## [Luke 16:1-13](#)

To what do we give greatest value? In this tale an estate manager didn't give enough attention to his job and was told he was sacked – he had mismanaged the business. His sacking was a personal disaster because without a good reference the chances of further employment were nil. Out of self-interest and to avoid the indignity of begging, he devised a plan that would possibly gain him a few friends. When the time came they might save him from disaster by speaking well of him. The manager called in all his master's debtors in turn and each received a substantial reduction of their debt. His master commended his shrewd action.

Some commentators suggest that the debt relief may have come from manager's 'commission'. The manager had waived his commission to win favour with the debtors. If you see the amount by which he cut the debt you will see the commission was quite extortionate. This is not unusual – vulnerable people in debt frequently fall prey to exploitation. In effect, the manager was putting right an injustice by reducing his commission – albeit for his own self-interest. Whatever the motive, the deed was commended. Maximising profit regardless of the cost was no longer his priority. The manager realised his wellbeing was inextricably linked to the wellbeing of others.

Verse 9 can cause some problems! Perhaps it can be understood that earthly money, perhaps even when it is associated with evil, can be used for a good outcome. An example of this is that the extortionate commission (an evil), when waived, enabled the beginning of new relationships.

Our relationship to money reflects our relationship to others and ultimately to God. Wealth is a power tool and the value we give to it shapes our lives. Similarly, those who love God and prioritise service are shaped in the image of God, and God's kingdom.

### Questions

- How does our relationship with money reflect our relationship with God and with others?
- What adjustments do we need to make in our priorities?

## Sermon ideas

### Peace is a Priority

1 Timothy 2:1-2: “First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings should be made for everyone, for kings and all who are in high positions, so that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and dignity.”

Today, violence and conflict affect the lives of 1.5 billion people. One in every 122 people on earth is a refugee. Our governments spend nearly 250 times more on military spending than on peace building. Our scripture text says ‘First of all’ ... pray. Make Peace your Priority.

When we are peacemakers we are demonstrating God’s character. ‘Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God’ (Matthew 5:43). As peacemakers we participate in God’s work of salvation, who through Christ ‘was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or heaven, by making peace through the blood of the cross’ (Colossians 1:19).

### Peace is Problematic

Our work and witness for peace is problematic because as Church, we are often part of the problem, not part of the solution. People suffer because of the actions and attitude of Christians and their Church. We are part of a broken world and bear our responsibility for its brokenness.

However, what we have to offer is a vision of what a peaceful society can look like. We are not an example to follow; we are merely signposts to Jesus who is the Way, the Truth and the Life. The example the Church can give is that in acknowledging our failure and seeking forgiveness, transformation is possible and we can move from violence towards peace.

### Peace is Plural (all-inclusive)

In our readings today we have seen that God’s concern for peace encompasses the whole of creation. Amos’ message from God was that his society would be judged because of those who use their power to oppress the vulnerable and fail to have compassion for the poor. The Church cannot stand by while injustice continues.

Peace is for all, all of God’s creation, and so the Church’s mission in peacebuilding must leave no one behind. The Hebrew word for peace, *Shalom*, reflects this multifaceted aspect of Peace, where Shalom means harmony, wholeness, completeness, prosperity, welfare and tranquility.

## Peace is a Path

John S. Mbiti, the Kenyan Christian philosopher and author of *African Religions & Philosophy* (1), summed up a core cultural value of African Religion in the phrase, “I am because we are.” A Malawian proverb encapsulates the same idea when it says, “a person is a person because of and on behalf of other people.” The concept of ‘Ubuntu’ as expounded by Nelson Mandela is guided by the same concept of interdependent personhood and mutual generosity – “the belief in a universal bond of sharing that connects all humanity.” Our affluent culture has led us far away from the fundamentals of community life. Peace is a way of living in right relationship with others.

This is our witness as Church to God’s love for all people.

[1] *African Religions & Philosophy*, John S Mbiti, Heinemann, 1990.

## Time with children

He raises the poor from the dust,  
and lifts the needy from the ash heap,  
to make them sit with princes,  
with the princes of his people.

*Psalm 113.7-8*

Our psalm today talks about a poor person sitting in the dust.

What a terrible picture.

A person who hasn’t anything,  
and they have no friend to help them, all they can do is sit in the dust.  
How must that person have felt?

Ask the young people to imagine the scene – a poor person sitting in the dust: What does it feel like to be that person? Are they worried or sad? What do they wish for more than anything else? Would they like a friend to help them?

I don’t know if you ever felt that you had no friends.

My first day at school was a bit like that. There was no one I knew.  
I felt really sad. I also felt a little scared. I just didn’t want to be there.  
I never wanted to go to school again.  
The thing I wanted most in the world was a friend I could be with.

Thankfully that feeling didn't last long. I found someone who became a really good friend and we had great fun together. Because I had a good friend, I looked forward to going to school.

Remember the poor person sitting in the dust? What does God want for that person, that poor person in the dust?

Here's what the psalm goes on to say:  
'God wants them to be taken from the dust and to sit with princes.'

That's a bit how I felt when I found a friend. I couldn't have been happier I had everything I ever wanted.  
It felt like I had been sitting in the dust, and now I was sitting with princes.

God wants all poor people to feel they are like princes. And God wants us to help to make that happen.

When we come across someone who is sad, because they have no friend, what would God want us to do?

What would it be like if we met someone who was feeling so bad, they were like a poor person sitting in the dust, and because we became their friend, they felt like a prince or princess!!

That's what God wants us to do.

Let's sing together. CH4 528 – "Make me a channel of your peace"

## Prayers

A selection of prayers used by the Corrymeela Community ([www.corrymeela.org](http://www.corrymeela.org))

### Approach to God

Leader Christ, You are our Peace

**All You have broken down the hostility between us**

Leader There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female.

**All We are all one in You**

Leader      God was in You, reconciling the world to God  
**All**            **And has enlisted us in this service of reconciliation**

Leader      We are in Your body  
**All**            **And are members of one another**

Leader      We are a community of the Holy Spirit  
**All**            **Called to be witnesses of God's love**

Leader      The Lord be with you  
**All**            **Thanks be to God**

### **Thanksgiving**

Leader      Christ is come among us  
**All**            **Give glory**

Leader      Christ has come down from heaven  
**All**            **Give glory**

Leader      Christ is on earth,  
**All**            **Give glory**

Leader      Christ gives light to the world  
**All**            **Give glory**

Leader      Christ is with us always  
**All**            **Give glory**

Leader      Christ is our Peace  
**All**            **Give glory**

### **Confession**

**All**            **Before God, with the people of God, we confess our brokenness:  
To the ways we wound our lives,  
The lives of others,  
And the life of the world.  
May God forgive us,  
Christ renew us,  
And the Spirit heal us.    Amen**

Leader O God, make speed to save us  
All **O lord, make haste to help us**

**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  
Alleluia.**

### **Intercession**

**For our world** – *from Corrymeela Members' Prayer Guide*

God of compassion and mercy,  
we bring to You our divided society and our broken world  
seeking Your healing and transforming grace.  
It is easy for us to point the finger at others,  
Yet we know that we all need Your forgiveness  
So we lift into Your presence today  
Not only the victims of our conflicts  
But also those we have called enemies.

Break down the walls of hatred,  
distrust and bitterness  
and open a way for us  
to reach one another in truth and love.

Enable us to build a society where all can belong;  
Where we can share our gifts in mutual respect;  
And where the stranger can find a welcome  
Through Jesus Christ. Amen

### **Justice and Peace Litany**

*From 'Travelling the Road of Faith', worship resources from the Corrymeela Community*

Leader God of justice and peace, You call us from despair, depression and death  
All **keep us from being overwhelmed by the darkness without and within**

Leader Give freedom to those who are oppressed  
All **and let us play our part in creating that freedom**

- Leader  
**All** Be with those who face starvation in different countries  
**and with those who work to restore their dignity**
- Leader  
**All** Be with all who are imprisoned unjustly or tortured  
**and help us to see where we oppress others**
- Leader  
**All** Be with those who suffer illness or disease  
**and strengthen those who care for them**
- Leader  
**All** Touch the hearts and minds of those with power  
**that they may release the resources need to help and to heal**
- Leader  
**All** Be with those who suffer from brokenness in relationships  
**and let us stand alongside them**
- Leader  
**All** Be with those who have been bereaved  
**even in their despair let them know that you are there**
- Leader  
**All** Be with those who have used violence against others  
**let them see that there is a better way**
- Leader  
**All** God, You desire justice for those who are oppressed  
**give us a vision of Your Peace and let us play our part in creating it.**

### **Prayer of Courage**

*Said each day at Morning Prayer at the Corrymeela Community*

Courage comes from the heart  
And we are always welcomed by God,  
The Croi\* of all being.

We bear witness to our faith  
Knowing that we are called to live lives  
Of courage, love and reconciliation  
In the ordinary and extraordinary moments  
Of each day.

We bear witness too, to our failures  
And our complicity in the fractures of our world.

May we be courageous today.  
May we learn today.  
May we love today.

Amen

\*Croi is the Irish word for 'Heart', and is the name of the worship space at Corrymeela's Residential Centre.

### **International Prayer for Peace**

*Based on ancient Indian texts, adapted by Satish Kumar, this prayer is used by people of different faiths. The prayer was first publicly used in July 1981 by Mother Teresa in the Anglican Church, St. James', Piccadilly in London.*

Lead me from death to life, from falsehood to truth  
Lead me from despair to hope, from fear to trust  
Lead me from hate to love, from war to peace  
Let peace fill our heart, our world, our universe.

### **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 83 – "I rejoiced when I heard them say" – Good as an opening hymn introducing theme of peace
- CH4 528 – "Make me a channel of your peace" – Would be great after Time with Children
- CH4 659 – "Put peace into each other's hands" – After sermon
- CH4 715 – "Behold! the mountain of the Lord" – Relates well to Psalm 133
- CH4 707 – "Healing river of the Spirit" – At Intercessions

- CH4 253 – “Inspired by love and anger” – Good anywhere
- CH4 262 – “For the world and all its people” – Good anywhere
- CH4 710 – “‘I have a dream’, a man once said” – Good anywhere
- CH4 706 – “For the healing of the nations” – Prayer
- CH4 456 – “Christ is the world's true Light” – A good final hymn

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