

## Twenty-third Sunday after Pentecost

### Twenty-third Sunday after Pentecost – 13 November 2022

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## Introduction

We gather today to give thanks, through this Act of Remembrance. Remembrance Sunday is a time for us all as a nation to acknowledge corporately the sacrifice of those who have gone before us this year into God's hands, whether national figures, such as The Queen, or our loved ones; people who were important figures in our civic, military and private lives. This time allows us to focus on those whom we will miss most, while at the same time saluting those who gave their lives serving our country in the cause of the freedom we enjoy.

In my 27 years serving as a military chaplain with the Royal Marines and Royal Navy I have tried and tested many different liturgies from around the world. The liturgy I have gone back to again and again is found in the Church of Scotland Book of Common Order (pp 409-420), and is appropriate to use either at a War Memorial or in a church. The setting and those who are in attendance largely determine which parts of the Common Order liturgy and Gospel reading you choose to include. For today's Gospel reading I would choose John 15:9-17.

## Reflection

A couple of years ago I was given the privilege of preaching at Winchester Cathedral on Remembrance Sunday. It was a beautiful morning and the cathedral was packed to the rafters. After many years working in military chaplaincy I was very used to preaching in the outdoors or to small community gatherings. This was always done in short order, with a Padre's Dit (a Naval term for a short address) rather than a sermon. Thus, to be asked to preach the sermon in this great cathedral was something of a challenge to me if I was to choose a more orthodox style of delivery. It was then that it occurred to me that the cathedral would be filled that Sunday with people who do not normally go to church – rather it would be a mixture of people from the military, emergency services and youth organisations in uniform, many who perhaps would not want to be there. Indeed, many might not see the point of it all, expecting the customary talk about the two World Wars.

Then I also realised that some of the people in the congregation would belong to my own military family of the Royal Marines and Royal Navy, some might even have been on operations with me, in places such as Afghanistan, Iraq, the Balkans or Northern Ireland. Some would be bereaved family members who I might know and not have seen for a while and others who I would meet for the first time. Others would make up the local congregation or those from the area who came to the cathedral on special Sundays.

This all turned out to be true on the day. What would one say to all those people for ten minutes?

If I shed tears for fallen comrades and their families, it tends to be when I am alone in the car and listening to some music that brings back these memories. The band, Maroon 5 recorded a song called 'Memories', which captures thoughts and reactions to loss and survival. On that Sunday morning in Winchester Cathedral I decided I would sing the opening phrases of the song, with a glass in my hand.

"Here's to the ones that we got,  
cheers to the wish you were here but you're not,  
cause the drinks bring back all the memories  
of everything we've been through.  
Toast to the ones here today,  
toast to the ones that we lost on the way,  
'cause the drinks bring back all the memories  
and the memories bring back, memories bring back you..."

Everybody hurts sometimes,  
everybody hurts someday,  
but everything'll be alright,  
go and raise a glass and say...  
Here's to the ones that we got..."

Jesus was a young man, only 33 years old, when He died in a brutal killing. As far as we know, many of those who followed Him were young women and men. They were His friends and, just before His arrest and execution, He commanded them to love one another as He loved them. I suspect that these words meant something very deep to Jesus and His friends. Over time they would find deeper meaning in this call to follow Jesus' commands on how to live – many of them too would be executed.

Many tears will have been shed by those young women and men, despite their firm belief that "everything'll be alright", so they too could raise a glass or their hands in praise to their leader and friends who paid the ultimate price in serving God's Kingdom. Paul reminds us that we need to learn to rejoice and be content in all things – even on the bad days – but he does not forbid tears of healing. You may never have fought in a war, or lost a loved one in a military conflict, but you are likely to know someone who is bearing a loss or facing great pain through sickness. The more you love that person, the more your pain will be felt.

Remembrance is a time when we give thanks to those who have gone before us and set an example to us all in how to live well. They inspire us to live well ourselves. Jesus is our ultimate example and friend in this journey of life which, as we sing in the hymn of that name,

“...may be easy, may be hard, there will be danger on the way.  
But with Christ at my side I’ll do battle as I ride  
‘gainst the foe that will lead me astray.”

Today we remember those who paid the ultimate sacrifice in defending the freedoms under which we in the United Kingdom are privileged to live.

We pray for those who carry loss in their hearts and those who still bear the scars of conflict in body, mind and spirit.

We think of all those who have recently lost loved ones and those who walk a path of suffering with those in pain from illness.

We pray for the healing touch of the risen Christ to fall upon all of them and ask that they may know the reassurance of faith, that in and through Christ Jesus all things will be made new.

We raise a glass – cheers. Amen.

## **Resources for Remembrance**

### **A prayer before the Act of Remembrance**

Eternal God,

We have met this day in solemn remembrance  
of those who lived and died in service of their country.

We give thanks for their lives,  
and pray that You would enable us to be worthy of the sacrifice made on our behalf.

In this place,  
we remember particularly those whose names are etched upon this memorial:  
*(the names may be read if time allows.)*

May they rest in peace, and rise in glory.  
May our time of remembrance inspire us to be peacemakers in our own time.

In Jesus name, Amen.

### **The Tryst**

The fourth stanza of Laurence Binyon's poem *For the Fallen* is the traditional reading entering into the Act of Remembrance. It need not be read by the person leading the service but is read on behalf of the congregation. The congregation respond with the words in bold. You may also wish to include the third stanza, here in italics.

*They went with songs to the battle, they were young,  
Straight of limb, true of eye, steady and aglow.  
They were staunch to the end against odds uncounted,  
They fell with their faces to the foe.*

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.  
**We will remember them.**

### **Commitment to Peace**

*In addition to an Act of Remembrance, you may wish to include a commitment to peace by those present.*

We fall silent on this day because we never wish to forget or return to days where every family, every community is touched by the plague of war and death. In remembering the sacrifices made on our behalf, we are asked to be the change which our world so desperately needs.

To that end, silence is not enough, it must be matched by our actions. I therefore ask you the following three questions, trusting that in answering "I will" we might together build kingdom of peace.

Will you strive for all that makes for peace?  
**I will.**

Will you seek to heal the wounds of war?  
**I will.**

Will you work for a just future for all humanity?

**I will.**

May God help you to fulfil these promises.

## **Prayers for Remembrance**

### **Approach to God**

Gather us into Your presence, God of peace.

We trust that Your vision for the world –  
the great creation of Your imagination,  
entrusted to us as a place for our flourishing –  
is still there behind all the challenges of our lives.

We come today remembering that even in the darkest of days,  
Your flame of hope and new life flickers  
drawing us on to find the good  
and to illuminate the world with Your Gospel of love.

Help us to find You in the smallest of things  
and the most ordinary of our experiences.  
For You are the great source of our being  
and the power that sustains us through Your Holy Spirit.  
When we search hard for You,  
we may miss Your presence in the everyday –  
so, help us to look out for You –  
in the face of friend and stranger,  
in the wonder and beauty of our world,  
in the complexity of design  
in the creativity of artist and scientist.

### **Collect**

Lord of the ages,  
our hope in times of trouble,  
and our consolation in grief;  
bring us a spirit of renewal,  
so that Your people may honour those who have given their lives  
in service to their country in conflict.  
May their service kindle in us the desire for peace and unity,

which is Your hope for all people.  
This we pray through Jesus Christ our Lord,  
**Amen**

**Prayer based on the Remembrance Day lectionary** (*Book of Common Order p643, Year C*)

Eternal God

You forget nothing.

All the days and events which have been lived  
were done so under Your ever-loving and all-seeing eye.

You have journeyed with us and with our forebears,  
and so while we must take the time to consciously remember,  
You do so without forgetting a moment that has been.  
We give thanks this day for Your faithfulness to Your people in every land and age,  
for Your presence with them in the dark days that they have faced,  
and we come to praise You that no matter what challenge lies before us,  
You have promised to be with us.

We acknowledge now that we have not walked the paths that lead to peace.  
We have hated our neighbours;  
we have kept hold of the prejudices and assumptions  
that belittle others and foment division.

In our thoughts, words and actions,  
we have been selfish and unfeeling to the needs of others.  
When we have seen injustice in action, we have been silent.  
Rather than being peacemakers, we have erred against one another  
and against You.

Help us O Lord, to be the people You have called us to be.  
Forgive us for our sin which we confess before You,  
trusting in Your mercy and compassion.

Eternal God

Your mercy renews and refreshes us.

We give You thanks and praise that we are a new people, entrusted to bring Your peace  
– a peace that passes all understanding – to those we encounter.

Bless us as we carry out this holy purpose and task.

Send Your Holy Spirit to be upon us,  
as together we pray the prayer Jesus taught us,  
saying: Our Father...

### **Confession**

We live in You,  
the great mystery of our being  
which is beyond our understanding –  
yet revealed – in the life, death, and resurrection of Your Son.  
You are there underpinning our lives,  
offering to us all that we need to live well.  
All too often we grasp after our prosperity and our safety,  
building walls of self-sufficiency,  
storing up great resources in the barns of our nation,  
finding “the other” and difference to be a threat to us.  
We fall into ways of war when Your ways are of peace.  
On this day of remembrance,  
when we pay tribute to those who have given so much  
when war became the way,  
we confess the faults of nations who have gone to war  
and missed Your ways of peace,  
and hold all of this before You in the silence now.....

### **Silence for an appropriate length of time**

#### ***Kyrie Eleison: Lord have mercy upon us***

[this could be said, or a sung version e.g., CH4 777 could be used]

### **Declaration of forgiveness**

God of all,  
Your ways are of mercy,  
Your heart is for reconciliation,  
so help us to accept the hand of forgiveness that You offer.  
Help us to leave behind what has weighed us down,  
to seek the ways of friendship and peace,  
and to trust that You want the best for us.  
Bring us the peace of being part of Your offering of forgiveness,  
and to embrace our role of being peacemakers in the course of our ordinary lives.



### **Thanksgiving and intercession**

Hear us now as we offer our prayers of thanksgiving  
for all the good in our lives.

On this day, we hold with gratitude the service of those who are peacemakers  
in their service of our country.

We are grateful for a vision that will hold the darker forces of our humanity in check  
with an ethos of cooperation, harmony and mutual flourishing.

We pray for the dedicated service of our armed forces in all the generations,  
remembering especially those who still remain with us from the Second World War.

We thank You for their testimony  
which reminds us of the tragedy of conflict.

Help us to hear it  
even as we honour the sacrifices made in search of the good.

***Ubi caritas et amor.....*** [The Taizé chant is found at CH4 801, or it could be said  
responsively]

On this day when we are drawn together from many backgrounds,  
and with faith flickering, strong, or with no faith,  
we thank You that there are times and causes  
around which we can all rally for the common good.

Help us to find that common ground more,  
and to work through our differences.

May the example of Jesus, His boundary-crossing life,  
His open-hearted embrace of all peoples,  
be the inspiration for our weary and wounded world.

In the visions of Isaiah and Revelation,  
Your faithful people have penned the dreams and challenges of our deepest thinkers,  
our most creative and perceptive voices.

So we give thanks for the people who will look at our world  
and will be the dreamers.

We pray to for the fixers:

for the people who will take the dreams and make them reality.

So we hold before You all of our leaders,  
praying for tenacity, energy, and an open-eyed, open-hearted vision  
for our communities and the world.

***Ubi caritas et amor.....***

On this day of remembrance,  
we pray for those who have lost loved-ones in conflict,  
and through the collateral damage of war.  
We think of those close to home in our army, navy and air force.  
We remember those on the other side to us in conflict,  
and we think of the deep scars of conflict that mark our world  
whenever there is war.

May our remembering be for new beginnings,  
so that lives lost are the foundations of new worlds.  
May the vision of the prophets be our vision too.  
May Your forgiveness be our forgiveness.

***Ubi caritas et amor.....***

God of the cross and the empty tomb,  
God of the road to Emmaus  
and the breakfast on the shore.  
You have shown us in Jesus the way that is beyond death,  
so hold us in the faith of Your future.  
Help us to rest in the confidence of new light and life,  
to trust that those we have loved and lost have returned to You,  
and that our own walk is the way home  
where You wait for us in the mystery of eternal life.

May our prayers rise to You like incense,  
God our maker, our saviour and sustainer.

**Amen**

**Prayers for others**

God of peace

We come this day in solemn remembrance and prayerful witness  
to the courage, self-sacrifice and devotion to duty of those who have given of themselves in  
service to others.

We remember those who lost their lives and the grieving families and friends they left  
behind.

We remember also those who came home but who lost something of themselves on fields of battle.

Those who lost limb, or reason, or sense of self.

We pray that Your comfort will be known by all who have seen the realities and dangers of war.

Ease the pain of those who grieve,  
being renewal to those whose health in body or mind has been diminished.

We seek Your blessing upon members of our Armed Forces and upon their families.  
Grant to them safety in the fulfilment of their duties,  
defend them as they face dangers of many kinds,  
and grant to them wisdom and courage as they work for peace and justice in our lifetimes.

We remember those who faced and continue to face significant challenge at home.  
For families torn apart by war,  
for those forced to leave the familiar and seek safety and refuge elsewhere.  
For those whose homes have been destroyed,  
or who cannot return due to dangers caused by conflict.

We pray for lands where neighbours have become enemies,  
where brothers have picked up weapons against one another  
and we seek Your reconciliation and peace.  
We give thanks for the times and places where we can see seeds of peace growing.

We pray for those who have never known war,  
and we plead that this will long continue.  
Grant a love of peace to our Young people,  
that they will make choices that lead to harmony.

We pray for our King, Charles,  
and for all of his ministers in Westminster and Holyrood.  
Grant to them wisdom in the fulfilment of their duties,  
that they will seek to make our world a place of safety and of prosperity for all.  
We pray particularly for our Member of Parliament, *(you may wish to name them here)*,  
and for our Member of the Scottish Parliament, *(you may wish to name them here)*,

Grant that Your Church will speak out with passion for the sake of those who are voiceless.  
Save us from silence or complacency  
and inspire us by Your Holy Spirit to prepare the way of the Lord today,  
and always.

In this time of silence,  
we bring to You those things that weigh heavily upon our hearts,  
trusting in the mercy and intercession of Your Holy Spirit.

*Silence*

We pray these things in the name of Christ, Amen

### **Blessing**

May the God of love fill your heart with peace  
and send you into the world to live it.

And the blessing of God Almighty,  
our Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer,  
be with you and those you love,  
this day and always.

**Amen**

### **Musical suggestions**

Our online music resource is on the Church of Scotland website; you can listen to samples of every song in the Church Hymnary 4th edition (CH4) and download a selection of recordings for use in worship. You will also find playlists for this week and liturgical seasons and themes on the Weekly Worship and Inspire Me tabs.

You can find musical suggestions for this week in a range of styles on the [Songs for Sunday blog](#) from Trinity College Glasgow.

- A suggested playlist of songs from CH4 for Remembrance can be found online here: <https://music.churchofscotland.org.uk/inspire-me/playlist/remembrance>

#### **Items for soloists, music group or choir:**

- “If the war goes on” [[I will not sing alone](#), Wild Goose Publications] – is a haunting hymn of hopeful resistance to the narrative of conflict in so many places and an

encouragement to the church to renew its vision of peace. A choir or soloist would be best for this. The style is hymn-like with a timeless and universal quality to the music.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=znxADLz7H7E>

- CH4 11 – Psalm 20 – with words by John Bell that reflect the elements of thanksgiving for what is good in our lives, the realistic recognition of the ways in which humanity fails to live up to God’s hopes, and a vision for a better future. It has a lovely haunting melody, and could make a good solo to follow the two-minute silence, or immediately prior to the sermon to focus us on the mix of feelings that are contained in today’s service. The music lends itself to a gentle folk style, and instruments such as guitar, violin, cello, flute, and penny whistle could all be used to good effect
- CH4 54 – “Lord, you have always been our home” (Psalm 90) – is often used on Remembrance Sunday, reminding us of our frailty and smallness in the bigger picture of God’s reality. The other side of this is the encouragement to seize the day and live well. Do not waste your life in conflict – find a better way. This is a wonderful setting of some of Psalm 90, particularly using the tune Athchuinge, known to some as a theme tune for the National Mod. It is well worth adding to the repertoire, and is easily singable. If not known, the first two verses could be sung by a soloist or choir, and then the congregation could join in for verses 3-5
- CH4 14 – “The Lord’s my Shepherd” – Psalm 23. A loved hymn familiar to most, which speaks of God being with us always
- CH4 81 – “I to the hills will lift mine eyes” – Psalm 121. A hymn that reminds us that our help in times of trouble and distress is in God
- CH4 153 – “Great is thy faithfulness” – A hymn of praise that God is close to us and remains constant in his affection for us
- CH4 159 – “Lord, for the years” – a favourite hymn of trust that God will show us positive ways forward in our national life: renewal is the dominant note here. This would be a great closing hymn for the service
- CH4 161 – “O God our help in ages past” – A well-known hymn that recounts God’s presence with us and promise to be with us in the future. Churches with skilled organists might like to pick up the melody which underpins the fugue of J.S. Bach’s Prelude and Fugue in E flat Major [BWV 552]

- CH4 182 – “Now thank we all our God” – a classic hymn of thanksgiving; a great way to conclude the service
- CH4 192 – “All my hope on God is founded” – a robust hymn, great for a large congregation, which speaks of placing our trust in God rather than the ways of humanity (both tunes are excellent)
- CH4 260 – “Eternal Father, strong to save” – Known as the Naval hymn, this hymn speaks of God’s power in creation and its refrain reminds us to pray for those who find themselves upon the power of the seas
- CH4 361 – “Forgiveness is your gift” – a beautiful Skye folk melody, lovely for a music group, to accompany Ian Fraser’s expression of God’s forgiveness that leads to new beginnings
- CH4 528 – “Make me a channel of your peace” – a popular setting of the hymn of St Francis, which encourages us to think about our vocation in Christian living
- CH4 562 – “Through the love of God our Saviour” – A hymn that reminds us that God will reconcile all things to himself
- CH4 580 – “Abide with me” – A hymn of grief that seeks God to be with us
- CH4 704 – “I vow to thee, my country” – A hymn of dedication to nation and to God
- CH4 706 – “For the healing of the nations” – A hymn that speaks of the hope for peace to reign upon our world
- CH4 710 – “‘I have a dream’, a man once said” – great words to a very well-known tune (Repton, used for Dear Lord and Father of Mankind). Cleverly drawing together resonances of Martin Luther King, Jesus, and the Prophets, this is a great hymn of encouragement – we can find unity and peace. It is in our hands
- CH4 712 – “What shall we pray for those who died” – A hymn for peace for all who have known war. John Bell’s words, created in partnership with the Carnwadric Parish Church Worship Group, dig into the human experiences of war and remembrance, with clear-eyed recognition that we can be tempted by voices which make war seem like a good idea in support of a cause

- CH4 715 – “Behold! the mountain of the Lord” – a Remembrance Sunday classic sung to the tune Glasgow. The paraphrase picks up on the themes of a mountain-top banquet of peace which transforms our warring ways
- CH4 721 – “We lay our broken world” – this beautiful hymn with its simple and wistful melody is clear-eyed in recognising the broken aspects of our humanity, but ultimately offers a vision of renewal that encourages us to live towards a better world
- CH4 726 – “When we are living, we are in the Lord” – A hymn that reminds us that we all belong to God
- CH4 737 – “Will your anchor hold in the storms of life” – The Boys Brigade hymn, if you have a BB unit parading it may be appropriate to include this hymn
- CH4 740 – “For all the saints” – A hymn that reminds us of the communion we hold with those no longer alive

### **Further resources for Remembrance**

This material is provided in addition to the many resources available to help shape a Remembrance Sunday service that is going to be appropriate for your local context.

Churches Together in Britain and Ireland (CTBI) [Remembrance Sunday Order of Service](#)  
The Baptist Peace Fellowship [produced material](#) to mark the eightieth anniversary of the ending of World War One; it has since been updated slightly.

The British Legion advice on conducting the Act of Remembrance. This includes a downloadable sound file that includes the Last Post, a two-minute silence and the Reveille.

<https://www.britishlegion.org.uk/get-involved/remembrance/about-remembrance/act-of-remembrance>

## Archive material based on the Revised Common Lectionary

(Rev Dr Grant Barclay, 2016)

### [Isaiah 65:17-25](#)

If Isaiah 64 contained a veiled criticism that God remains silent and holds back from acting at a time of national suffering, this reading from the second half of the following chapter is a swift rejoinder, strongly affirming both God's intention to act and that such divine activity shall result in renewal, rejoicing and peace.

Divine action, however, takes place within the context of human structures. The broader view of Third Isaiah (chapters 56-66) is that worship in the Temple in Jerusalem – a physical, observable, human institution – is a channel for God's activity throughout the world. Worship in the idealised new temple in Jerusalem (the 'holy mountain') will differ from what has gone before principally in its inclusivity: it is a location for ideal peace where 'wolf and lamb shall feed together.'

Our passage begins with a vision of a 'new heavens and a new earth.' This is not a complete break with the past: many of the attributes of the new relate to imperfections found in the old. Yet the theme of continuing development is important, distinct from new construction from the ground up. A pictorial illustration of renewal which has continuity at its heart is Mametz Wood, part of the battle site of the Somme. The entire forested area was decimated during the [Battle](#); today trees have regrown and it is a place of peaceful, if painful, remembering. An [image of the battle scenes](#) licensed for reuse is available. Also licensed for reuse is an [image of the present wood](#), with memorial in foreground.

It is hard to discern these are pictures of the same place. God-created nature is able, over time, to effect such a change; this may offer an image of what might be possible, and encouragement to attempt and achieve far more, amongst people not only created but energised and led by God.

The prophet reminds – or perhaps challenges us – to see that our work, stacked against high odds or seemingly to no purpose, is not in vain when it coheres with the purposes of the constantly re-creating God. Holiness is, in part, both seeing God's world from God's revealed viewpoint and acting on that perspective. The prophet's message emphasises justice and provision for all as a key aspect of God's re-created heavens and earth. In offering such a view it presents a clear call to God's people to work for its growth to fruitfulness.



### [Isaiah 12:1-6](#)

This chapter looks much more like a psalm than a prophet's proclamation; and one of gladness and thanksgiving rather than of mourning. Probably written in exile in Babylon, perhaps using earlier material, its aim is to rekindle the living faith of a people for whom the challenges of living under oppression in a strange land and surrounded by unknown but apparently powerful gods was more than they could bear.

These words revive a dead faith as they look both to the future and also recognise what is present in the here-and-now. Looking ahead, the psalmist-prophet says there will come a day when the experience of faith will be one of comfort and not judgement – and that will lead to thanksgiving. At the present moment, though, the writer reminds God's people that even in the midst of all that makes faith little short of impossible, God is nevertheless present. This God-with-us is strong and is mighty to save.

The author doesn't, however, rebuke his readers for their failure to trust nor does he simply shout from far-off to tell them what to do. The exiles in Babylon are encouraged to sing as generations before them did, even when all the evidence around might prompt them to keep quiet. In the singing, the substance of their song grows stronger; they draw on the heritage of faithful worship as one might pull fresh water from an ancient well, and little by little their confidence in the Holy One of Israel grows. In some ways it might seem outlandish that such a small, impoverished and oppressed people should be bold even to imagine that their God should be spoken about across the earth. We know how the story continues, and we see such a view was, and is, not mistaken.

### [Malachi 4:1-2a](#)

If we recognise that Remembrance comes only a few Sundays before the celebration of Christ the King, and then the season of Advent which culminates in celebrating the birth of Immanuel, we might see a liturgical context for these verses. They come as a final contribution in an imagined argument between the people of Israel and God. The people are accused of having spoken 'harshly' or 'arrogantly' against the Lord; they don't recognise the accusation and it is then spelled out to them in greater detail.

The accusation is that they have, in the previous section, articulated an exasperation with a God who appears not to take justice either as seriously as they themselves do, or as they wish God did (3:13-15). In the interlude (3:16-18) the names of those who 'revered the Lord' are recorded, for their later safe-keeping; immediately thereafter comes our passage. Seen in this light these verses are less about fire and brimstone and are much more an

affirmation that, despite appearances to the contrary, the day of God's judgement shows that God is indeed deeply concerned about justice.

It may also be significant that God is concerned for the group who 'revered the Lord' (3:16). The Lord takes note of their identities and describes them in an intimate and possessive way: 'They shall be mine,' says the Lord of hosts.

Yet the day is coming – though the time of its arrival is not addressed – and this day is described in terms of heat and all-consuming combustion which leaves only charred stumps. Parallels may be drawn with Mametz Wood, mentioned above.

The Lord who acts is indifferent to no wrong, so those who are proud and arrogant, as well as evildoers in a more general sense, shall not escape. However, as the sun's rising dispels the darkness of night, the group of faithful worshippers will see righteousness dawn on them. It may be too easy to jump quickly to a Christological reading of these verses; though it is interesting that it is with the sun's first light that, centuries later, the women discover the garden tomb is empty. Any sense of moral triumphalism in the righteous 'treading down the wicked' (verse 3, slightly beyond our passage) ought to be balanced by the emphasis that this is all the Lord's doing: the rising of this sun occurs at the start of that day when the Lord acts.

For a community so hard-pressed that it is tempted to give up trusting in – and therefore working for – an improved God-ordained moral order, this eschatological vision serves as assurance that there shall come a day when evil will simply not be able to prosper. Working today for the cause of justice is not in vain.

## [Psalm 98](#)

This is the penultimate psalm in a group of six whose theme is that the Lord is King. Not, though, any deity-king, as though some entrant in a beauty-parade contest amongst contemporary gods of the surrounding peoples. This is the Lord who has gained the victory and who makes this victory known; in response the whole earth, and all the seas, and everything on earth shout out in united praise to give glory to the Lord.

Those who gathered in the Temple and who sang, or listened to, this psalm would have been sensitive to the nature of the victory the Lord had gained. The 'marvellous deeds' of the Lord are permanently tied up with God's 'steadfast love and faithfulness.'

The historical setting is likely to have been the release of exiles from captivity in Babylon. Being set free from an apparently unstoppable oppressor is seen as God's doing: the Hebrew phrase translated 'marvellous things' is reserved for God's acts. What is made new is not only the future of those who were allowed to return home, but in every age the hope of those who look for God to act, not depending on some human helping hand but flowing from God's nature which is to demonstrate covenant love and constant faithfulness.

The psalm encourages several responses. Faith looks closely for the victory God demonstrates: this may not always be clear and unmistakable. Faith also recognises the global nature of the victory and so, while it is welcomed by those who are relatively well-off and secure, it is – and has to be demonstrated to be – also good news for those who are oppressed and who presently struggle with inadequate food, water, education and health, and with the deleterious effects of climate change. Faith rejoices in the novelty of this 'new song' and joins joyfully with the chorus of all creation which worships without reserve. Walter Brueggemann, speaking about praise in the Psalms, has said that '[w]e have a resilient hunger to move beyond self. God is addressed not because we have need, but simply because God is God.' (Walter Brueggemann, *Israel's Praise: Doxology against Idolatry and Ideology*. Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1988).

Finally, the word for 'victory' here is 'yeshua' - the name taken by 'Jesus' the Word made flesh in whom we see the most marvellous victory of God. This psalm is not fulfilled but is, rather, filled more fully in His life, teaching, death and resurrection. When this psalm is seen in the broader light of salvation history, there is every reason to sing a new song praising God!

## [2 Thessalonians 3:6-13](#)

This passage is not really about not working; it's about doing the wrong kind of work to the wrong ends. In both verses 6 and 11 Paul speaks, literally, of 'walking idly:' a somewhat contradictory image, since true idleness may involve more lounging about than stepping out. The passage is, then, not about people who are unable to work for a variety of reasons; it concerns instead those who are working at being busybodies and not advancing the cause of the Gospel, the growth of the church or providing support to those who were engaged in ministry.

Were these the ones peddling deceit about the coming Day of the Lord in the previous chapter, stirring up disquiet and possibly even forging a letter to give an appearance of apostolic authority? Intrigue like this might not be out of place in a Trollope novel; it may be discerned here, in one of the early Christian communities. Paul's rhetorical brilliance is hard

to capture in English, but in verse 11 he further describes the 'idle walkers' as those 'walking around' other members of the fellowship. Perhaps ideas of 'running rings around' or winding others around one's little finger may be helpful parallels. It is entirely possible to be actively walking, but to do so to unproductive and even negative ends. This gets one about as far as does running in circles.

The whole letter is shot through with direct instruction, and even congratulation, on the importance of 'work' or activity. We are created by God in order that we might take part in good deeds. We demonstrate our calling as the people of God by consistently working for good over the long term. It is not only that we are on the move – our activity has to be directed God-ward and in line with God's purposes.

And so the passage concludes with an exhortation not to be weary, or lose heart, in doing good. There may be a temptation to turn from this to mischief-making; but another temptation is simply to give up. In the face of unrelenting injustice or evil, or weighed down by what we see much closer to home and even in our experience of church, we may be tempted either literally or figuratively to withdraw, to 'pull up the drawbridge' on faithful living and retreat into a quietism which avoids acting in the real world. Paul's encouragement may be echoed in the hymn words: 'Faint not, nor fear; his arm is near / he does not change, and you are dear.' (JSB Monsell, CH4 517). In that knowledge and strength we are called to endure in faithful work to further God's purposes.

### [Luke 21:5-19](#)

The ten chapters beginning at Luke 9 might be read as a sort of travel narrative, a journey journal which includes many challenges and where things do not improve much upon arrival in Jerusalem. Jesus appears in our passage to be suggesting that the future will be no less demanding for His followers than the past has been; if it is written some years later than its setting, it suggests that the lived experience of the early Jesus movement was deeply challenging.

Much of Jesus' teaching here echoes that of the prophets. To what extent did these echoes ring true in Jesus' context, and what do they say to us in ours? One thing seems certain: human experience is one of struggle. Whilst we might all yearn for a day when war is over, the truth is that not only in conflict, but also in environmental and other challenges, humanity and all creation is constantly involved in the labour of survival and the sheer hard work of endeavouring to make progress.

Another certainty is that human creations are short-lived. The Temple was built as an impressive, permanent dwelling of God on earth – yet it was not to last, and was reduced to rubble by other human hands. Archaeological discoveries remind us that, relatively quickly, things we make become forgotten and lost. We see around us how quickly the efforts of past generations, at one time seemingly solid and immovable, crumble or are bulldozed for new development.

Change and decay may be the visible tip of the iceberg of human experience. Jesus makes plain that there is every possibility the people of God will be misled, that they will suffer in war and natural disaster, that injustice and persecution will visit them as much as it shall anyone else, and that betrayal and even death will not be unknown. Yet sitting below all this, unseen like the greater bulk of the ice mass, is the faithfulness of God in whom none is dead, but all are alive for ever (Luke 20:38). The endurance of the people of God in the face of forces and circumstances which appear all-conquering is a sign of the underlying faithfulness of God. This daily taking up of one's cross is activity which Jesus has already encouraged in this Gospel (9:23-24); it has, then, already come with the promise that in losing our lives for Christ's sake they shall truly be found.

### **Reflection – the experience of conflict**

The Very Rev John Miller, when Minister in Castlemilk, collected first-hand accounts of warfare from parishioners which he used at all-age Remembrance services over a period of twenty years. The accounts are published in *Silent Heroes: Ordinary People in Times of War* (St Andrew Press, 2004). The first account, given by Mr John Turner in 1985, describes his experiences on the front line in World War One. Wounded earlier in his hand and leg at Loos, after some convalescence he returned to the front line at the Somme. This is part of his account:

“We went through a place, ‘Happy Valley’ they called it, into the trenches. On the second or third day we got issued with rum. And we were told we’d be going over the top in the afternoon.

The afternoon came, and sure enough we got the order to go over the top. About 100 yards out over the top, we got the order to go half-left. So we switched direction, and I got caught in machine-gun fire; wounded in the leg. I lay there for quite a while. Then trying to crawl back to the lines, I threw away my rifle, haversack, everything, and crawled back. I remember shells coming over, bursting twenty yards behind me, showering me with everything. After a while, maybe an hour, I managed to get back. When I reached the bit of the trench that jutted out, I went head first and fell right in. I was back. I sat there for a long time; no-one ever came near me.

I attended to my own wounds; took the bandage out of my pocket, bandaged my leg tight to soak the bleeding. I sat there on the first step, that the men used to stand on when they were firing over the top. I smelt a funny smell as I sat there. I looked down and there was a foot. A German's foot was showing through the bottom of the trench: the body must all have been covered in the trench wall. Another chap by this time was sitting opposite me. Another shell burst and showered us, and he was wounded in the knee. Blood was spurting out of his leg. I helped him bandage it up and told him to get away as quick as possible to the dressing station.

Night came and I still wasn't moved. I lay down in the bottom of the trench, stuck at the back of the firing step. It was pit-black and I fell asleep. I was awakened by soldiers rushing up the trench; they were stepping on top of me. I shouted, 'Keep to your left! Wounded Man!' but they kept on running and kept stepping on top of me."

(John Miller, [Silent Heroes](#), pp.4-5; used with permission).

## Sermon ideas

### Balanced towards justice

On one spectrum of wrong thinking, two extreme points might be to think either that the world is so messed up that it is beyond any point of redemption or being changed for the better, or that things are not really so bad after all and, accordingly, not all that much really needs to be done. The second may be more of a temptation for those who live without exposure to the challenges which poverty or social disruption bring; likewise tales of terror frequently told in media news can cloud the relatively high level of health and security which many of us now enjoy.

Do we, either in our despair or complacency, too readily believe the lie that the world can't, or doesn't really need to, change? As we encounter the living God in worship and life, do we recognise this as the God who is 'about to create new heavens and a new earth'? Does this in turn energise us to work for a world where there might be less weeping, reduced infant mortality, increased health for longer periods for more of the world's population (and that in parts of Scotland as much as globally), increased security for more people from the ravages of storm, earthquake and rising seas, and a stable supply of food for all? We may need to look further than our own field of view to recognise where God's justice needs to be most keenly felt; but we ought not to think that the factors which will bring it about are so far from us, or from our ability to influence, that God's justice is not making demands on our attitudes and actions right where we are.

### **Who's listening?**

The encouragement in Isaiah 12 to sing in challenging times may be not unlike Paul and Barnabas in prison, singing together in the midst of deep difficulty and recalling the presence with them of the God in whom they still trusted. The story tells us that other prisoners were listening to the singing; who knows how others are encouraged by the example of faithful living and exuberant praise even in tough times?

### **Jesus would have us be committed to justice**

The Gospel reading, reflecting the challenge of faith in a world of violence, encourages us to stand firm and to speak out. We are called to endure, to remain faithful in the face of suffering and to continue our commitment particularly in a world of violence, betrayal and injustice. We are also called not to give up on God – and especially not a God of peace – even though the world has been, and continues to be, soaked in conflict.

Jesus suggests that our experience of such a world, and our trust in the truth of God's promise in Christ, should sustain our belief-driven action. We are not to remain silent; we are not to hide in modern-day Anderson shelters of our making in groupings of world-denying belief or oases of cosy cultural Christianity. A world of violence, warfare and oppression gives us 'an opportunity to testify.' And we are to testify to God's faithful presence, God's redeeming love, God's desire for justice for all across the face of the earth. At the Methodist Conference 2016 the Vice President, Rachel Lampard, in her address said:

"A commitment to justice and holiness changes us and will change the Church, if we have the courage. The courage to be a guest at the party, instead of the host. The courage first to listen instead of speak, to first ask why instead of rushing to offer solutions. But then together to speak and act boldly. The courage together to join in the mission of God that he invites us to share. And we do it all in the knowledge that, by God's grace, anything can be possible."

### **Creative worship**

#### **Poppy field**

Members of the congregation could be invited to write prayers or thoughts about aspects of war on poppy shapes cut from red (or white) coloured card. These prayers could be affixed to green pipe cleaners then brought to the front of the church and inserted in a base of florist oasis/foam to create a 'field' of poppy prayers. While the poppies are brought forward some music could be played, or a poem (such as 'In Flanders Fields') could be read.

### **Leaves for healing of the nations**

A similar idea to the poppy field is to set up a 'wood' of bare trees, using dowelling rods (perhaps of differing thicknesses) fixed to some base material, or to use twigs or small, bare branches. Leaf-shaped pieces of card with a small string or thread attached may be distributed to the congregation before the service.

Worshippers are invited at an appropriate point to write prayers for healing and peace on the leaves which are then either hung on the bare branches by worshippers coming forward, or collected and hung. In this way the bare wood is covered with greenery.

This activity could form part of a liturgy of intercession, possibly making use of the poem Mametz Wood, (below), contrasted by Old and New Testament imagery of healing leaves:

*Fruit trees of all kinds will grow on both banks of the river. Their leaves will not wither, nor will their fruit fail. Every month they will bear fruit, because the water from the sanctuary flows to them. Their fruit will serve for food and their leaves for healing (Ezekiel 47:12, NIV-UK).*

*On each side of the river stood the tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month. And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations (Revelation 22:2, NIV).*

### **Prayers**

*Prayer based on lines from CH4 161, possibly spoken by different voices*

O God, our help in ages past, our hope for years to come:  
We have gathered in remembrance of days long gone,  
lives long given up, telegrams long since read;  
and to continue remembering through the generations,  
confident that Your faithfulness lasts for ever.

Under the shadow of Thy throne Your saints have dwelt secure:  
We come before You, this day, Lord:  
recognising that guns have, in the past, fallen silent;  
that agreements were reached and led to peace;  
that your present Word to us is one of Life and peace.

Sufficient is Your arm alone, and our defence is sure:  
Help us to put our trust in You, God come among humankind



that we may see in all people Your image,  
that we may follow Christ's way of serving,  
that in Your security we may risk much for peace.

From everlasting You are God, to endless years the same:  
Enable us to discern Your way to peaceful living,  
to strive against violence to people and to planet,  
to struggle for justice for all on this earth,  
and to combat all that works against Your purposes of peace.

Lord, be our guard while troubles last, and our eternal home:  
Keep us from seeing in violence the answer to deeper ills.  
Embed within us a vision of earth more like heaven  
and give us confidence that Your kingdom shall prevail  
through Christ, the Prince of Peace. Amen!

### **Prayer of intercession**

When we remember...  
lives etched as shadows on broken walls  
following nuclear fission  
and the fractured bonds of a common humanity:  
tell us of Your new heavens and new earth.

When we see...  
oil-fields burning in the desert,  
clouding any hope of ordinary living,  
turning days of opportunity to nights of fear:  
tell us of Your new heavens and new earth.

When we hear of...  
young lives lost by the thousand,  
and forests turned to wasteland to capture a dozen yards of land:  
tell us of Your new heavens and new earth.

When our instinct tells us...  
to reject rather than welcome diversity  
because we have too well learned lessons of terror:  
tell us of Your new heavens and new earth.

When we watch...  
athletes compete with strength and skill  
in ways which conquer war-caused injury:  
tell us of Your new heavens and new earth.

When we despair...  
and think that nothing changes and no hope is real,  
or that peace is too elusive and too fragile to survive:  
tell us of Your new heavens and new earth  
and of Your Son:  
victim of violence,  
sentenced to die,  
risen from death  
the first fruits of Your new heaven and new earth.

### **Prayer**

Not for us the same-old, same-old,  
familiar phrases,  
meaning drowned  
in long-forgotten memories of those no longer here.  
This is the time for new songs,  
fresh praise on instruments played with joy:  
for God has shown faithfulness;  
our God has made love known.

Not for us timid days of fearful quiet,  
unsure of what's to come  
and clinging to a rose-tinted age long past.  
The sea is shouting, the hills are crying out,  
the whole earth praises God – and so do we;  
for God is here, present all across the earth:  
and God has shown faithfulness;  
our God has made love known.

You call us, Lord –  
to sing Your song,  
to demonstrate Your justice,  
to embody Your peace,  
to praise Your Name

with all of our strength, all of our lives;  
and to rejoice in what we have come to know:  
that God has shown faithfulness;  
our God has made love known.  
Through Jesus Christ. Amen.

### Poem

[Mametz Wood](#) by Owen Sheers, (2005) available to download.

### Musical suggestions

Our online music resource is on the Church of Scotland website; you can listen to samples of every song in the Church Hymnary 4th edition (CH4) and download a selection of recordings for use in worship. You will also find playlists for this week and liturgical seasons and themes on the Weekly Worship and Inspire Me tabs.

You can find musical suggestions for this week in a range of styles on the [Songs for Sunday blog](#) from Trinity College Glasgow.

- A suggested playlist of songs from CH4 for Remembrance can be found online here: <https://music.churchofscotland.org.uk/inspire-me/playlist/remembrance>
- CH4 60 – “Come, let us praise the Lord”
- CH4 61 – “Oh, sing a new song to the Lord”
- CH4 84 – “Now Israel may say, and that truly”
- CH4 85 – “Now let God's people, let God's Israel”
- CH4 112 – “God, whose almighty word”
- CH4 126 – “Let's sing to the Lord, yes, sing God a new song”
- CH4 141 – “Oh, the life of the world is a joy and a treasure”
- CH4 171 – “Take up the song, and sing the praise of God”
- CH4 217 – “God of day and God of darkness”

- CH4 238 – “Lord, bring the day to pass”
- CH4 241 – “Isaiah the prophet has written of old”
- CH4 264 – “Judge Eternal, throned in splendour”
- CH4 266 – “God the Omnipotent! King who ordainest”
- CH4 280 – “Alleluia! Hurry the Lord is near”
- CH4 350 – “When Jesus the healer passed through Galilee”

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