

Welcome to the joint worship for Christ Church and The Bridgwater Drive Church. As today is Remembrance Sunday we will not be following the lectionary and we will observe the 2 minute silence at 11am.

Call to Worship Micah 4:1-4

Come let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob;
that God may teach us his ways and we may walk in his paths.
The Lord shall judge between the peoples and arbitrate between the nations,
they shall beat their swords into plowshares
and their spears into pruning hooks,
nation shall not lift up sword against nation; neither shall they learn war any more...
Let us walk in the name of the Lord our God forever.

Hymn Our God, Our Help in Ages Past (R&S 705)

Our God, our help in ages past,
our hope for years to come,
our shelter from the stormy blast,
and our eternal home.

under the shadow of thy throne
thy saints have dwelt secure;
sufficient is thine arm alone,
and our defence is sure.

Before the hills in order stood,
or earth received her frame,
from everlasting thou art God,
to endless years the same.

A thousand ages in thy sight
are like an evening gone;
short as the watch that ends the night
before the rising sun.

Time, like an ever-rolling stream,
bears all our years away;
they fly, forgotten, as a dream
dies at the opening day.

Our God, our help in ages past,
our hope for years to come,
be Thou our guard while troubles last,
and our eternal home.

Opening prayer

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

LORD'S PRAYER

The Dead by Rupert Brooke

These hearts were woven of human joys and cares,
washed marvellously with sorrow, swift to mirth
The years had given them kindness. Dawn was theirs,
and sunset, and the colours of the earth.
These had seen movement, and heard music; known
slumber and waking; loved; gone proudly friended;
felt the quick stir of wonder; sat alone;
touched flowers and furs and cheeks. All this is ended.
There are waters blown by changing winds to laughter
and lit by the rich skies, all day. And after,
frost, with a gesture, stays the waves that dance
and wandering loveliness. He leaves a white
unbroken glory, a gathered radiance,
a width, a shining peace, under the night.

Silence by Malcolm Guite

November pierces with its bleak remembrance
Of all the bitterness and waste of war.
Our silence tries but fails to make a semblance
Of that lost peace they thought worth fighting for.
Our silence seethes instead with wraiths and whispers,
And all the restless rumour of new wars,
The shells are falling all around our vespers,
No moment is unscarred, there is no pause,
In every instant bloodied innocence
Falls to the weary earth and whilst we stand
Quiescence ends again in acquiescence,
And Abel's blood still cries in every land
One silence only might redeem that blood
Only the silence of a dying God.

Act of Remembrance (please stand)

Let us recall before God
those who have given their lives in the cause of freedom
and in the service of others especially those known to us.
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.

Last Post 2 minute silence

We will remember them.

We will remember them.

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

Hymn For the healing of the nations (R&S 620)

For the healing of the nations,
Lord, we pray with one accord,
for a just and equal sharing
of the things that earth affords.
To a life of love in action
help us rise and pledge our word.

Lead us forward into freedom,
from despair your world release,
that, redeemed from war and hatred,
all may come and go in peace.
Show us how through care and goodness
fear will die and hope increase.

All that kills abundant living,
let it from the earth be banned:
pride of status, race or schooling,
dogmas that obscure your plan.
In our common quest for justice
may we hallow brief life's span.

You, Creator God, have written
your great name on humankind;
for our growing in your likeness
bring the life of Christ to mind;
that by our response and service
earth its destiny may find.

Bible readings: **Psalm 118 1-9, 14, 29**
 Romans 8: 31-39

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Numerous times throughout history, people have mis-used, and indeed misquoted Romans 8 verse 31 – If God is for us, who is against us. This has been framed as ‘God is on our side’ and used as a justification for war, both religious, like the Crusades, and non-religious.

George Bush described the Iraq war as a conflict between good and evil saying God was on the side of America. A BBC headline in 2003 said, ‘Bush puts God on his side.’ Likewise, Tony Blair believed God wanted him to go to war as part of a “Christian battle” and he subsequently talked openly about how his Christian faith had underpinned his decision to go to war, despite many Christians demonstrating against the war. The headline of a 2016 article in the Tablet used the phrase ‘with God on his side’ to introduce this discussion of Blair’s faith and the war.

An international study in 2007 showed that if people think God sanctions violence, if people believe that God is on their side, they are more likely to engage in violent acts and inflict pain on those perceived to be their enemies. *Even* non-believers do this. When the participants heard a Bible passage in which God sanctioned violence, even people who said they did not believe in God or the Bible subsequently acted more violently, although the believers in God acted the most aggressively. So the media and world leaders suggesting that God is on their side, especially in decisions about war is not just a snappy use of words, it is very dangerous.

Words matter. How we interpret scripture matters. That is why we read commentaries by people who have studied the original languages and the biblical context, why we build on tradition, and listen for the Holy Spirit to guide us, and don’t only say what we think a passage means, although of course we tend to do that too. Someone else reflecting on this passage from Romans would no doubt have a different perspective. Let’s look at what Paul the apostle is saying in this passage from Romans.

It is the conclusion, the summary, of the points Paul has been making in chapters five to eight. Our God, is not a god who can be appeased or placated by human activity, God’s activity came first. God acted for us. Our actions are in response to God’s love and grace. God has shown that love by giving up God’s only Son. The Lord has shown us what is required – to do justice and to love kindness. No one can condemn God’s people because God himself justifies them. This does not mean God condones our actions if they are evil, or our lack of action in the face of injustice, it means that God forgives us and loves us anyway, as a mother continues to love a child even when it has done something naughty.

In a nutshell, this passage is the assurance of God’s grace. If God is for us, with us, what do we have to fear from any mortal? Nothing, absolutely nothing; not even famine, persecution and war, not even death can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus. When I was at theological college, someone once suggested that a useful tool for exegesis is to see if you can tweet the main point of a passage. Well if Paul was on Twitter he’d be saying Nothing can separate us from the love of God. #you fools, #why haven’t you been listening to me!

This is a bold claim Paul makes. How can he make it? Because God gave his only son for us. If God can do that, then there is nothing that God won’t do to express love for us. But this doesn’t mean

that God will do everything for us. That God will be on our side when we do wrong. Nor that we are protected from all the bad things in life. Bad things happen, and will continue to happen until the transformation of reality when the kingdom of God is fulfilled. We see the news every day, terrible things happening – wars, refugees, starvation, homelessness, racism and of course Coronavirus, but these things are temporary. Nothing that happens to us during our life can have a negative effect on God's love for us. Nothing can separate us from that love, not even our own rebelling against God, or our ignoring God, even these things can be overcome.

So, does this mean we should sit back and do nothing? Because God loves us anyway, it doesn't matter what we do? Bad things might happen to good people but in the end it doesn't really matter? No, we are to respond to God's love, to seek justice and peace. Evil exists. It is not to be denied; it is to be resisted.

When Paul talks about being justified by faith in Christ Jesus and not by works, he is referring to works of the law, the Jewish law of the time and the emphasis on food laws and circumcision that we thankfully do not have time to go into! But our faith is not a passive thing, sitting back and accepting the grace of God and thinking that saves us and makes us better than others. That view leads to the path that ends up saying God is on my side, so I can do whatever I want especially to those who don't have my God on their side. Our faith is active, responding to God's love with kindness and justice. Our swords will not magically turn into plowshares, we have to beat them into plowshares.

Suffering and affliction will happen, but they are not God's last word. For God's love, God's action is God's raising of Christ. Through this God demonstrates that there is nothing God won't do for us. God does not love us *despite* our suffering, but in the midst of it. As Paul likes to remind us, in Christ we can claim God's infinite grace, but only if we partake in Christ's death as well as his resurrection. The final word is not politicians who claim that God is on their side; the final word is God's – 'in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us'. We may be like sheep to be slaughtered but in this and in all things God is with us.

Prayers of intercession

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

God give peace

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

God give peace

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

God give peace

for peace-makers and peace-keepers, who seek to keep this world secure and free;
May God give peace

God give peace

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

God give peace

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

Hymn Make Me a Channel of your Peace (R&S 629)

Make me a channel of your peace.
Where there is hatred let me bring your love;
Where there is injury your pardon, Lord;
And where there's doubt true faith in you.

Refrain:

*Oh, Master grant that I may never seek
So much to be consoled as to console;
To be understood as to understand;
To be loved as to love with all my soul.*

Make me a channel of your peace.
Where there's despair in life let me bring hope;
Where there is darkness, only light;
And where there's sadness, ever joy.

Refrain

Make me a channel of your peace.
It is in pardoning that we are pardoned;
In giving to all men that we receive;
And in dying that we're born to eternal life.

Blessing

May God bless us with anger at injustice, oppression and exploitation of people
so that we will work for justice, equity and peace.
May God bless us with tears to shed for those who suffer from
pain, rejection, starvation and war
so that we will reach out to comfort them and change their pain to joy.
And may God bless us with the foolishness to think that
we can make a difference in the world
so that we will do things which others tell us cannot be done. Amen