

Christ Church, 13 Nov. Remembrance Sunday 2022.

Call to worship (inspired by Isaiah 65:17-25)

The Lord says, I am about to create new heavens and a new earth,
where the wolf and the lamb shall eat together
and they shall not hurt or destroy on all my holy mountain.

Celebrate and rejoice all you people of Christ, for the Lord our God is doing a new thing!
The old order is gone, everything is new!
Illness, disease and crying and mourning, shall be as a distant memory!
Hatred and war shall cease from the earth,
for Christ has risen! Death is defeated! Hallelujah! Jesus lives!

Hymn O God our help in ages past R&S 705

Gifts

In the offering of our gifts, as well as the living of our days,
may we not grow weary of doing what is right,
but commit to speaking up for the voiceless,
healing the broken, feeding the hungry,
and all those mercies which are such a part of your heart
and your hope for all your people. Amen.

Opening Prayer URC Prayer Handbook, p67

Hymn For a world Red folder 24

Bible readings: **Isaiah 65:17-25**
 Luke 21:5-19

The first thing that came to my mind when I read this passage from Isaiah was the Palestinian people. – ‘They shall not build and another inhabit: they shall not plant and another eat.’ Unfortunately, that is exactly what has happened to many Palestinians who were removed, or fled from their homes in 1948, expecting to return, but they have never been able to return. The state of Israel has steadily encroached on Palestinian land. There are more and more Jewish settlements in Palestine, despite the international community having determined these settlements are illegal. And now that Netanyahu has been returned as Prime Minister in Israel, with a right-wing coalition of ultra-nationalist and ultra-Orthodox allies, things are likely to only get worse for the Palestinians.

Until fairly recently, Palestinians were the largest refugee population. Even in 2021, Palestinians were the third highest number of refugees, behind Syria and Venezuela. About half the Palestinian population lives outside the Occupied Palestinian Territory as refugees. In host countries Palestinian refugees are often unwelcome and their rights denied. Refugees are people who have been forced to flee their home country in order to escape conflict, violence, natural disaster, or persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, political stance, or association with a particular social group. According to the United Nations, an estimated 84 million people around the world were forcibly displaced by the

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midway point of 2021, and that is before the start of the war in Ukraine. The highest number ever recorded, this total included 26.6 million international refugees living in a nation other than their country of birth, 48 million individuals displaced in their own country, and 4.4 million people seeking asylum in a new country. About half of all refugees are children. Palestinians feel more isolated and marginalised than ever before. While governments talk about peace, it is displacement, discrimination and insecurity that dominate the lives of people across the Occupied Palestinian Territory and overcrowded refugee camps in neighbouring states – with no end in sight. Until Palestinians and Israelis can participate as equals in a time-bound peace process, grounded in international law – a process that gives proper weight to the existing inequalities of power between the parties – violent conflict will persist. Without justice, equality and dignity, a durable peace will continue to elude both Palestinians and Israelis. Instead, poverty and despair will deepen, leaving many Palestinians dependent on humanitarian aid and facing endemic insecurity.

80% of Gaza's population, which exceeds 2 million, are aid dependent and almost half the population are unemployed. Cut off from the world, this densely populated strip of land has been further isolated by COVID-19-related restrictions. Israel has effectively placed Gaza's civilian population under permanent blockade since 2007. Since 1967, Israeli checkpoints have been a common feature of the occupation. These, however, have become progressively more constraining on the movement of the population. Gaza has been virtually sealed off. It is extremely difficult to obtain a permit to leave or enter Gaza without a compelling justification. In the West Bank, there are in the order of 700 impediments ranging from 60 or so manned checkpoints to earth mounds and concrete blocks across roads to restrict movement by Palestinians.

Through Commitment for Life we now support Israel/Palestine as our designated region. Commitment for life works in partnership with Christian Aid's work in support of Palestinian refugees. Today, as we think of all those affected by war, and pray for peace, we remember that Jesus was a refugee, fleeing to escape violence. Let us commit to confronting this ongoing injustice of the Palestinian people, using all the influence we have. 'They shall not hurt or destroy on all my holy mountain says, the Lord.' Let us remember that Palestine is holy land, and the holy city of Jerusalem is sacred to Muslims, Christians and Jews. Talk of the Temple in Jerusalem, leads us to our Gospel reading. The temple was beautiful, we are told. It had recently been refurbished by Herod the Great. And apparently, the work had been done very well. The rebuilding project had taken eighty years to complete and had spared no expense. The most talented artisans had been employed and had used the best materials available, such as white marble. Blue, scarlet, and purple Babylonian

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tapestries made of fine linen formed a veil at the entrance. And there were gold and silver-plated gates and gold-plated doors throughout. Rest assured that our building project will not have any marble or gold! The people who were interacting with Jesus in the temple were admiring this beauty that had been dedicated to God when Jesus delivered horrible news: the temple would soon be completely destroyed. Imagine their surprise upon hearing this news. Why was something so beautiful, and that had taken so long to create, about to be destroyed? But the followers of Jesus did not ask him how he knew about the temple's destruction, they only asked when it would happen.

They totally trusted and believed in Jesus, so if he said that the Temple would be destroyed, then surely it would be. (In fact it was about 70 years after Jesus died, and the Wailing Wall in Jerusalem is all that is left.) While Jesus' followers had unwavering faith in him, Jesus did not want them to share that same unwavering faith in everyone who would come in his name. Some of them would be false prophets who could lead Jesus' people astray. 'Do not go after them', Jesus warns.

While the temple was indeed destroyed by the Romans in 70 A.D., neither Judaism nor Christianity was destroyed. The Spirit of God transcends buildings and structures. Both religions continued to grow and evolve over the centuries in new geographical locations, and among people of many ethnicities and races. We can take heart that though Christianity seems to be declining in many denominations, especially here in the UK, through the Spirit and power of God, it will continue to live and grow in new forms and new places. Our job is to ask for discernment about what God wants us to do and then follow the guidance of the Holy Spirit to get it done. We need to find new ways to be the church – not just trying to get people here on a Sunday morning, but helping them to stay warm, supporting people to manage their finances better, to take care of their mental health, and listening to what people in our community want from the church.

Jesus told his followers that before the temple was destroyed, they would be arrested and persecuted. Those who chose to follow Christ could expect to be persecuted by both Jews and Romans, and we know that they were – there were many martyrs in the early church. Today Christianity is one of the world's major religions, but here in the UK we are in a minority. Last week's Sunday programme on Radio 4 was talking about the Church of England bishops who have made statements in favour of the Anglican church conducting same-sex marriages. Those who spoke in favour, said their minds had been changed. The interviewer asked the person who was not in favour, whether it was more important for the established church to hold to a Biblical view or be more in line with the people it is supposed to represent. The Bible has far less to say about marriage being between a man

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and a woman, than it says against divorce or injustice, yet most denominations, including the Church of England are now not very bothered if people get divorced, indeed the King, the defender of the faith, has been divorced. The person being interviewed dodged the question directly, but seemed to imply that he would rather be out of step with society on that matter.

On that point I disagree. Yes, we are a counter-cultural people, but where we should be out of step with society is not on who people love and want to marry, but on the fact that people cannot afford to eat and heat their homes, that the rich countries are not taking responsibility for the climate disaster, that energy companies are not being forced to pay more tax on their obscene profits, that people may lose their homes due to the rise in interest rates, that children spend most of their time playing on devices, rather than playing games together and exploring nature, that we have an obesity crisis. For speaking out on those kind of things we will be persecuted, for speaking up for the Palestinians we will be maligned in certain places, and Jesus told us it would be so. But do not despair, he says, I will give you the words and the wisdom, and 'not a hair of your head will perish.'

Authentic Christian faith is about the liberation of all of God's people. Not all persecution leads to physical injury, or death, sometimes, challenging the status quo can lead to being ostracized or marginalized. When we are being maligned, we can feel as if we have been abandoned by those we thought were our friends and allies. If and when we experience mistreatment because we are following the ways of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, we have only to remember that Jesus predicted it would happen, and we can take heart that God will be with us even in our times of trial.

Hymn I have a dream Red folder 39

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,
and all those who never returned from previous wars
remembering family, friends and all who pray for their safe return;
May God give peace **God give peace**

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

Especially this year, we pray for the people of Ukraine,
the soldiers keeping them safe,

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the soldiers of Russia, many forced to do things they wish not to do,
and for the people of Russia that they may have the strength to fight for peace.
May God give peace **God give peace**

Any other conflict situations...
for peace-makers and peace-keepers, who seek to keep this world secure and free;
May God give peace **God give peace**

for all those forced to leave their homes due to conflict,
for refugees from all wars and conflicts over the years,
and those displaced in their own land
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 forever. **Amen.**

Lord's Prayer

Hymn For the healing of the nations R&S 620

Preparing for the act of Remembrance (items included depending on time available)

Hymn Let justice roll down Red folder 53

Poem - The Absent, Edward Muir

They are not here. And we, we are the *Others*
who walk by ourselves unquestioned in the sun
which shines for us and only for us.
For they are not here.
And are made known to us in this great absence
that lies upon us and is between us, since they are not here.
Now, in this kingdom of summer idleness
where slowly we the sun-tranced multitudes dream and wander
in deep oblivion of brightness
and breathe ourselves out, out into the air –
it is absence that receives us;
we do not touch, our souls go out in the absence
that lies between us and is about us.
For we are the *Others*,
and so we sorrow for these that are not with us,
not knowing we sorrow or that this is our sorrow
since it is long past thought or memory or device of mourning,
sorrow for loss of that which we never possessed,
the ever-present that in their absence are with us

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that sorrow and loneliness might bring a blessing upon us.

Hymn Make me a channel of your peace R&S 629

Poem - 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

Two minute silence

The Reveille

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.

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