

**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

**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, O God,  
and your hope for all your people. Amen.

**Opening prayer**

As 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. Amen

**Hymn** For the healing of the nations R&S 620

**Children's Time**

Today is a solemn day when we remember the sacrifice of many in service of their country  
and for our freedom; we are also reminded that many still lay down their lives in defence of  
country and what is perceived to be right. In remembering the sacrifice of the many for us,  
we are also reminded of the ultimate sacrifice of our Lord Jesus Christ who died that we  
might have life and have it abundantly.

Poppies –

**Prayer**

Good morning God, good morning Jesus and good morning Spirit.  
Or perhaps it is not such a good morning for some –  
especially as in the forefront of our minds today is remembering all those  
who have lost their lives in the service of our country and for our freedom  
Perhaps we have not had a good week or day but come here out of a sense of duty;  
but whatever our mindset please calm our hearts as we breathe in your Spirit,  
and breathe out our stress and distress;  
Clear our minds of what troubles or burdens us and help us focus on You here with us now.  
As we come to this moment knowing that it is a sad day of remembering, and in  
remembering there is also the idea that we may have forgotten some things  
or perhaps someone.  
Please forgive us for this oversight or forgetfulness, may we not forget that we are all your  
people, all created in your image and all worthy of your love.

Holy God, forgive us for the times when we have not shared your good news with those around us, or when we ourselves have not remembered your good news for us and so have acted at war with those around us; make us conduits of peace - not the absence of conflict but wholeness of life with ourselves, each other, you and your world. Amen

**Hymn**      I have a dream Red Folder 39      **Children leave for Sunday Club**

**Bible readings:**    **Isaiah 65:17-25**  
                         **Romans 8:31-39**

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 the Occupied West Bank, despite the international community having determined these settlements are illegal. And we know that in two years of war, Gaza has been obliterated, with over 67,000 dead, mostly civilian and many children. The fragile peace is hanging by a thread and may not hold. Today, as we think of all those affected by war, and pray for peace, we remember that Jesus came not only as the Prince of Peace, but was a refugee, having to flee as an infant with his parents to escape violence. So as followers of Christ, let us commit to confronting injustices and working and praying for peace.

Ultimately, this passage from Isaiah is hopeful – God is declaring through the prophet, that God will make all things new – there will be no more weeping or cries of distress. The wolf and the lamb shall feed together and the lion eat straw like the ox. ‘They shall not hurt or destroy on all my holy mountain says, the Lord.’ If only it were so. Written well over 2,000 years ago, this prophecy and desire has still not come true. There are numerous conflicts and wars around the world, especially on God’s holy mountain in the Holy Land, a land sacred to Muslims, Christians and Jews. The war to end all wars, sadly came nowhere near being the end of war.

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. And more recently, Trump has claimed to have God on his side when he was shot, and has also stated it on other occasions.

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. This passage, in fact all of chapter 8 of Paul's letter to the community in Rome, is a message of hope for all who are loved by, encouraged by, equipped by, and empowered by God. It is the conclusion, the summary, of the points Paul has been making in chapters five to eight. Paul emphasizes that God will end the present age marked with suffering and establish God's good purposes on earth. Paul assures the Romans that their present realities, such as hardship, distress, persecution, famine, impoverishment, and war, will cease when the full glory of God is revealed. Paul assures the Romans that God is on their side. Despite how things seem, they are not alone. In the times in which we live in now, we might be unable to see an end to the present sufferings of the world. We might feel helpless and at a loss for words, unsure about what or how to pray. In this moment, Paul assures us - God is listening.

But Paul's reassurance should not be mistaken for a theology in which our positive actions result in positive life outcomes. Our God is not a god who can be appeased or placated by human activity, God's activity came first. God acted for us. And our actions are in response to God's love and grace. As Paul tells us in verse 28, those who love God are called according to God's purpose. The work is not God's alone. We are called to join God in the work of making the world good. God has shown love by giving up God's only Son. 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

they have 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.

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, and increasingly climate related disasters like Hurricane Melissa and storms and flooding in many parts of the world, but for Paul 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. Through God's action in raising Christ 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.

**Hymn** God of freedom, God of justice R&S 625

**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**

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**

for the people of Ukraine struggling for freedom and the people of Russia living with lies and manipulation, for the people of Yemen, Afghanistan, India, Pakistan, Sudan and the myriads of countries too many to name, suffering drawn out conflicts, for the people of Gaza and the Occupied Territories living with violence, terror, and oppression and for the people of Israel yearning for security. May God give peace **God give peace**

Personal God, we turn now to our own conflict and grief – where there is conflict in our homes or families, may love and forgiveness prevail, so reconciliation can be a possibility.

For our inner conflict of doubt and questioning, may we know that you are with us ‘in all these things’ that we do not shoulder our burdens alone, but you are with us.

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.**

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

**Preparing for the act of Remembrance** (poems included depending on time available)  
*Invite to light candles for peace if time*

### **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.

### **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  
that sorrow and loneliness might bring a blessing upon us.

### **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**

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.

**Blessing**

May the Christ who is with us “in all these things”  
continue to be with us as we go into a suffering and lost world  
to share in each other’s lives, to share freedom and peace and hope,  
give us the courage to be all these to ourselves too.  
And may the blessings of God the peacemaker, Jesus the light and hope and  
the enabling Spirit, be with us now and evermore. Amen.