

or measured by normal human standards – it is just too shot through with grace and generosity in a way that sometimes makes humans very angry! The parallel with Jonah is clear, and in part with the Philippians, who are still learning that they must simply accept what God gives – nothing more, nothing less. Peace of heart and a passion to do God’s will, come to us with the gift of faith. By faith, we will be freed from our sin of petty jealousies. Sometimes, it is not just strangers who might pose the greatest challenge. We also have to learn to care for those who have what may seem to us an unfair advantage, as much as we care for our own interests.

In a hard world, the only way forward for any of us is to keep re-telling the great story of faith (as in the Psalm) and to try and create the space in which faith and hope will be born in us.

When we can truly own, *For me to live is Christ, to die is gain*, (Philippians 1:21), our lives will be lived in the light of love, even through the hardest challenges. Then we will appreciate God’s Peace both within us, and touching others, through us.

Peacemaking Sunday

18 September 2011



A service on the theme of Peace, to mark the United Nations International Day of Peace on 21 September 2011, and following a call to prayer from the World Council of Churches



All should be now have been well.

Perversely, Jonah resented the way that God worked out the story of provision in his day. Jonah was angry, largely because his pride was hurt. God had not done it the way Jonah would have liked it done. Are we guilty of this?

In our generation, the power lines and material wealth across the nations are polarised into recognisable geographical pockets. Do we care deeply for those who suffer the horrors of war, and/or the degrading destitution and loss of hearth and home? Are we ready for God to speak in unexpected ways, and work with people of different cultures and faiths. Do we recognise in some of the most impoverished and degraded people, the harbingers of God's wisdom and God's Peace?

The main message of the biblical passage is, thankfully, that God will not be defeated by human perversity, and capitulate to Jonah's unattractive tendency. God saves the people of Nineveh from some terrible forthcoming disaster. God ploughs on with relentless love, anticipating that, in the end, even Jonah will have to be thankful again.

Philippians 1:21-30

The Christian community in Philippi is another candidate for despair in the light of the way things work out for them. They find they are suffering, even though they are committed to God's ways, and their inclination is to give up. Paul reminds them that the gospel was never about an easy life. They are actually called to live the pattern of Christ – so that for them *to live is Christ*, (and dying is a kind of gain).

This is another version of rehearsing the great story of faith. Here Paul recalls Jesus' death (very much as it is repeatedly brought to mind at communion), anticipating that it will awaken a new spirit of hope and thanksgiving in the Philippian Christians.

This is the source of Paul's courage in the face of persecution. He does not fear death, so he is in a position to take risks for God, and to travel wherever God leads him. He is open to speaking the Gospel story of Peace and Love. Are we also open to taking the necessary risks for the sake of Peace?

Matthew 20:1-16

This is in every way an exceptionally perverse Gospel story. Its original context and meaning are probably lost, so that it now seems to stand as a very obtuse fragment in the teaching of Jesus.

What it seems to offer for the original listeners and the modern reader alike, is a reminder that the story of God's provision for the world cannot be controlled

This service uses the Common Lectionary texts for Sunday 18th September, but you may choose to pray for peace on another day:

Psalm 105:1-6, 37-45; Jonah 3:10-4:11; Philippians 1:21-30; Matthew 20:1-16

The following resources are intended to provide a flexible range of materials, so that worship leaders can make a suitable selection.

Biblical Reflection

Contents

Psalm 105

This psalm calls people of faith to rediscover the spirit of thanksgiving in hard times. Human life is vulnerable. The Psalmist declares that, despite evidence to the contrary, God is with us in the midst of our toughest experiences. To convince his listeners, he rehearses the memory of all that God has done, lifting distressed hearts.

The Psalmist draws on the great faith story of Moses to inspire hope, notably the great symbolic moments of deliverance from oppression, guidance in wilderness, and provision of needs. The worshipper is thus connected into a great chain of remembrance, for the Moses story was itself the outcome of a promise to Abraham.

So for Israel in the context of exile (when the psalm was probably written), the chain extends back through Moses to Abraham and has the power to restore confidence.

Our twentieth century setting offers a revised starting point: our chain begins in the celebration of communion, the remembrance of Jesus, in company with the saints of the church on earth and on high - and links back to Moses and Abraham – providing us with new hope too, in a divided world.

This is the passport to genuine Peace.

Jonah 3:10-4:11

This story also provides an angle on why, in practise, it is so difficult for us humans to discover hope in God. Jonah is not alone in his narrow-mindedness. We all unwittingly carry the baggage of prejudice. Much of the time we exist within our familiar relationships and comfortable environment, and avoid dissonant encounters with people we find unattractive. We may consciously, or unconsciously, pigeon hole people. The tragedy of poverty is that it can degrade people, so that they may, unreasonably, appear unattractive to us. Sometimes, we are quick to label others, and to shun whole cultures which use different ways of behaving and communicating, from what seems 'normal' to us. But God has made humankind in his image, and loves every single human being! Our minds are closed to the true breadth of God's cares and concerns. Jonah thought the people of Nineveh, were ignorant and alien. God had to ask him more than once to approach this urgent mission field of lost people. If it had been left to Jonah, they would have remained in their lost state. When he did finally gets round to it, they heard God's voice, and repented of their sins.

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Call to Worship

God, Creator of the world, you have invested yourself in humanity.
God, Creator of the world, you have sent your Son to show us how to love.
God, Creator of the world, you call us to join in the project of Peace.
Gladly, humbly, we come to listen to your still, small voice, speaking into our lives.

(Let us sing together...)

Peace Blessings

Living, Loving God, Creator of Humankind,
Bless each one of us as we go on our way,
individually or together,
with love and unity of purpose.

Loving Christ, Creator of Compassion,
Bless us as we look constantly for fresh and new insights for peace.
Bless us as we strive to bring compassion
into our role in the search for global peace,
through our influence on leaders and politicians.

Refreshing, Dancing Spirit, Creator of Vitality,
Bless and encourage us to engage in lively activity
for peace and justice
in global situations;
to turn disappointments into challenges,
to transform darkness into light,
to root God-given,
Christ-like ideals wherever we and other people walk.

Go in Grace
with Confidence
and know Peace
Amen

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A Celtic Blessing

The deep peace of the powerful wave be with you,
The deep peace of the air that moves be with you,
The deep peace of the water that flows be with you,
The deep peace of the silent land be with you,
The deep peace of the shining stars be with you,
The deep peace of the Creator, Redeemer and the Spirit of Peace
be with you. **Amen**

Closing Prayer

Theme

Astoundingly Patient God

Astoundingly patient God
remain with us:

so that we may live in hope
that the church,
the people of God,
will put sympathetic awareness into loving action;

so that we may live in hope
that the people of God
will put off their masks of respectability
and take on the face of suffering humankind;

so that we may live in hope
that the people of God
will see Christ in the faces
of women and men who are victims of war;

so that we may live in hope
that the people of God
will denounce weapons of war
and speak out against the hypocrisy of
the arms trade;

so may we live in hope
and be motivated by urgent compassion,
to rise up
to go out
to be courageous
to get our hands dirty
in your service. **Amen**

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A Comment on the theme, using the projected image:



This sequence of images makes up the *Holy Communion predella*, by Francis Hoyland. The panel is painted in oils and is in *The Methodist Church's Collection of Modern Christian Art*.

A *predella* was a medieval freeze, which typically consisted of the five small paintings, which were to be found immediately underneath the great painting behind a high altar in a church or cathedral.

This twentieth century *predella* comprises a sequence of scenes from the life of the artist: the birth of a baby son; the infant baptism of another child; the family receiving communion in the local church; a homely family meal, and finally, the death of the artist's father. Perhaps the artist hopes to emphasise that God is in all of life, and that there are significant spiritual events with which many of us readily identify. They are all in their way, *peaceful* scenes.

We can easily identify with the importance of these events. How many of us have been overwhelmed in the presence of a brand new baby and found ourselves transported by joy, and wonder? With thankfulness, we bring our children to dedicate or baptise them, according to our tradition, and to set their young lives in the midst of the church community, to be cherished and supported.

The life of the Risen Christ, which resonates through these experiences, can be seen most graphically as the family receives bread and wine in Communion, an event which we too all share in community.

If you are a busy parent, struggling to feed hungry young humans, then perhaps

the calm picture of the family meal might feel unrealisable, but allowing it to speak to you now might help you to breathe the deep Peace of God, even when under pressure!

And how often do we ask God to be 'at our ending', through the hymnody of the church, and in that simple request, receive again the hope of eternal life, the ultimate peace? Even in our sadness at the loss of a family member, we may recognise God's hand, present in the earth's cycle of life and death.

Take time to look. Human experiences such as these are an intimation of God's gifts to us. A seam of goodness runs through this family story. But, in reality, it is a fragile peace. We don't immediately imagine, from the evidence before our eyes that this particular family's daily life might be interrupted at any minute by war, violence, torture or rape. Even to imagine violence into these scenes feels almost sacrilegious.

(Silent Pause, as the five images are seen, one by one, above the predella)

In your mind, compare Hoyland's depiction of this family at peace with those other images which we too-frequently watch – families facing imminent destruction as the forces of evil erupt in personal lives and communities. Families fleeing. Parents across the world, unable to feed their children, and grieving for childhoods brutally ended. Millions of people are suffering like that, today. The fragile peace celebrated in the Holy Communion *predella*, with all its potential for God-given beauty and goodness and gentle death, is shattered in the face of fear, pain, brutality and devastation. And so it was, when Jesus was tortured and crucified.

(Silent Pause)

Living God, we pray that your Holy Spirit will move in the hearts of those who hold the power to influence the hurting peoples of the earth. We pray especially for the United Nations and for all peace-keeping forces, that they may hold courageously to their mission of transforming conflict into negotiation and trust.

Creating God: bring healing, bring peace

Announce: "a Predella of faith"



(slowly show 5 powerpoint slides: Sikh image, UK townscape with modern mosque, bread and wine, a Jewish image, a rural chapel)

Living God, we pray that your passion for peace and justice will be spoken by all people of faith. God of many names, bring your Al-Salam, bring your Shanti, bring your Peace, bring your Shalom between all people of goodwill...

We offer ourselves and the work of this church to be a peace community, sharing the love of Christ through prayer in action. Bless us in the service of your Kingdom coming on earth.

Creating God: bring healing, bring peace

We bring our prayers in the name of the Risen Jesus Christ. **Amen**

squandered in armaments, depriving thousands of people of food, clean water, and education. We grieve with you for the young lives brutalised by war, for those today who lie wounded in under-resourced hospitals, for all whose minds are numbed by horror and loss.

Creating God: bring healing, bring peace

Announce: "a Predella of war-torn communities"



(slowly show 5 powerpoint slides: from Afghanistan, from Syria, persecuted Christians, from Israel-Palestine, from the Ivory coast)

Living God, we pray for an end to the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. We pray for all those in Arabic speaking countries who struggle for freedom and democracy. We pray for a just resolution to the terrible suffering in Israel-Palestine, in the land where you once lived, and died, and rose again. We pray for African nations whose cultures and societies have been damaged by the legacy of colonisation, and for Pakistan, where misguided followers of the great religions of the world clash, causing cycles of bloodshed, and suffering.

Creating God: bring healing, bring peace

Announce: "a Predella of power"



(slowly show 5 powerpoint slides: David Cameron with President Obama, The United Nations in session, the cross of Jesus Christ, UN soldiers talking with children, an image of hands being held, black and white.)

Action

You might care to create a 'predella' in preparation for this service, depicting the anguish of today's world, as preparation (or you might even construct one during the service). For example, you could make collages of newspaper images of war-torn countries, following the themes of Hoyland's series. Aim to create a visual awakening, which contrasts dramatically with Francis Hoyland's predella of peace and harmony.

Your predella could take its place as a prayerful offering at the foot of the cross of Christ, and be linked directly with intercessory prayer.

Peace Hymn

We pray for peace, yet in our hearts despairing:
our aching world is racked with strife and war.
Despite our prayers the conflict still continues,
and so we ask: what are we praying for?
You give us peace, but not as this world gives:
peace of the heart, peace of the mind,
Your parting gift to those who trust in you:
why is your peace so hard to find?

“Now live at peace, so far as it lies with you,”
so wrote Saint Paul, to churches based in Rome.
Their peaceful living could not change the empire,
but it pervaded every Christian home.
That peace helped shape the faith that they passed on:
peace in their minds, peace in their hearts,
serenity when facing troubled times,
and that pure joy true faith imparts.

Change our despair to hope of resurrection -
signs of new life throughout this treasured earth:
a new creation born of love's insistence
to value life above financial worth.
The peace we seek comes with your kingdom's reign,
not far away, not hard to find:
to change the world we must accept your gift:
Peace of the heart, Peace of the mind.

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Tune: O Store Gud / How great thou art

Intercessions – Powerpoint

Congregational response after each prayer:
Creating God: bring healing, bring peace

Announce: **“a Predella of the earth”**



(slowly show 5 powerpoint slides: earth from space, a sunrise, happy children, water, cornfield,)

Living God, we gaze with you on the beautiful earth and all that you have made, a planet full of cycles of life and nourishment, and we are aware that ‘all manner of things’ are not well. Human selfishness and greed have disturbed and ravaged the sources of sustenance for ourselves and for the rest of created life.

Creating God: bring healing, bring peace

Announce: **“a Predella of weapons”**



(slowly show 5 powerpoint slides: a child soldier, a vehicle with mounted rocket launcher, a refugee family, a nuclear submarine, a warplane)

Living God, we are so sorry that huge stores of the earth’s wealth are

I am the young boy
forced to enlist and become a child
soldier
to kill and hunt. The first thing to die?
My innocence.

I am the man on the street
too scared of uncomfortable truths
to pry into the shadows of my
country's politics and know
the truth of the acts that are being
done in my name.

We are both victim and oppressor
Both making and suffering violence;
sin stains, cracks and distorts us all.
We become disfigured by our own,
very human, situations.

Loving God
you too suffered as a victim.
God, who created the world in peace,
now nailed to a cross.
Beaten. Bruised.
You cried out "It is finished!"
Is it?

*© David Bunce—currently reading
German and Theology at St Andrew's
University*

A Prayer for the children

Lord, may they dance,
but not to adult fancies,
and may they play,
but not in dust of war.
May their small hands
not toil for others' profit.
May they grow safely,
nurtured by your love.

And Lord,
we ask that your Spirit
blow the mist from the minds of
war-mongers, arms traders, task
masters.
Kindle their imagination
till they no longer
'know not what they do'.

And may your Spirit
kindle a fire in us
and all earth's people,
that we may hunger and thirst for
justice
and never be satisfied,
until children everywhere
can run into the meadow of your
kingdom
and gather flowers
in safety, joy and peace. Amen

The Revd Jenny Hills, Baptist minister

Prayers

Gathering Prayer

God of peace, we come as we are,
God of justice, we come as we would
love to be.
We come bringing with us
those who are happy and those who
are worried,
those full of energy and those
achingly tired,
those we find it easy to love and
those we find it hard to love.

You whose love is infinite, inspire our
worship this day:
that we might rest in you,
enlarge our finite love for you, for
one another and for your creation,
and celebrate all that you are to
make peace in every place. Amen

*The Revd Caroline Homan, Methodist
minister*

Prayer of Praise and Thankfulness

Creative God, love so rich, so
complete: we worship you.
Healing God, constant in bringing
wholeness: we love you.
Energetic God, within all, beyond all:
we revere you.

And in the silence, let us remember
all that is good to offer,
with thankfulness to God...

Peacemaker God we are full of
thanks for all who have prayed for us,
forgiven us, brought us the gifts of
peace and of joy.

Loving God we are full of thanks for
all who offer second chances, refuse
to give up on your world, find the
way to build bridges; those who
lessen fear, and grow your kingdom
of peace with justice.

Life-giving God we are full of thanks
for all that you give us, your hope
and your healing, your grace and
your goodness. Hear our prayer and
so change and refresh us to become
your peacemakers this day. Amen

*The Revd Caroline Homan, Methodist
minister*

Prayer of Confession

Congregational response during this prayer:

*We pray that you will start with us,
for we share in it.*

Gracious and peace-loving God, we acknowledge that many things contribute to the violation of peace and to the absence of peace itself.

We name before your majesty injustice, violence, hatred of the other, intolerance of the other, racism, and a lack of faith among them. We acknowledge too, as we pray for peace and all that contributes to it, that we participate in its violation and its very absence.

When we plead with you for an end to injustice,
*we pray that you will start with us,
for we share in it.*

When we plead with you for an end to violence,
*we pray that you will start with us,
for we share in it.*

When we plead with you for an end to hatred,
*we pray that you will start with us,
for we share in it.*

When we plead with you for an end to intolerance,

*we pray that you will start with us,
for we share in it.*

When we plead with you for an end to racism,
*we pray that you will start with us,
for we share in it.*

When we plead with you for an end to a lack of faith in you,
*we pray that you will start with us,
for we share in it.*

When we plead with you for an end to war,
*we pray that you will start with us,
for we share in it.*

We confess our participation in the violation of your peace,
Forgive us, we pray, our gracious and peace-loving God,
in the name of your son, Jesus Christ.

A Prayer for Absolution

Jesus says to us,
“Peace I leave with you:
My peace I give to you.”

Gracious and peace-loving God,
*we pray that you will start with us,
for we share in it. Amen*

*The Revd David Rankin, Minister from
The Uniting Church in Australia,
seconded to the Methodist Church in UK*

Statement of Faith

We believe in one God
who created all the world,
who will unite all things in Christ
and who wants all people to live
together in one family.

We believe in God the Son
who became human: died and rose in
triumph
to reconcile all creation to God;
to break down every separating
barrier
of race, culture or class,
and to unite all people in one body.

We believe in God the Spirit,
the pledge of God’s coming reign
who gives the Church power to
proclaim the good news to all the
world,
to love and serve all people,
to strive for justice and peace:
to warn that God judges both the
individual and the nations;
and to summon all the world to
accept God’s reign, here and now.

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A Prayer of Lament: For a World at War

*“Gradually it was disclosed to me
that the line separating good and evil
passes not through states, nor
between classes, nor between
political parties either—but right
through every human heart—and
through all human hearts.”*

Alexander Solzhenitsyn

I am the child
whose face is scarred, charred and
bruised;
skin stripped off by another bomb
another number classified merely as
“collateral damage”.

I am the Palestinian farmer;
last week the bulldozers came.
They flattened my house. Now I’m
homeless
Merely a statistic, forced to move to
make way for Israeli settlements.

I am the soldier
so caught up with the job that I
forget the humanity of those
I torture, wound, kill or maim.
Sometimes, when I’m very still
I hear the screams.

I am the woman
who fell prey of the rape gangs,
the dogs that hunt in any war. My
story is so familiar
that it has stopped being told.