

Remembrance for whole-of-life disciples

In November each year, Remembrance Sunday and Armistice Day are both poignant opportunities to remember those who lost their lives in the First and Second World Wars, as well as later conflicts, and those affected by war today.

This booklet offers some thoughts from Martin Hayward, Mission and Development Officer for the United Reformed Church (URC) (Southern Synod), and Simon Peters, Walking the Way Project Manager for the URC.



It has several sections with the overall aim of exploring how whole-of-life disciples of Jesus can respond to the invitation to remember and the continued need for peace-making. It starts with **Remembering Together**, followed by some **Prayers for Peace** to encourage your own thinking and reflection.

A Journey through your Community enables you to take a walk, either physically or imagined, through your own area to reflect on those who have lost their lives through war or conflict, military or civilian, and to consider the role we can all play in bringing peace to the world.

At the end of the booklet, some links to partners and organisations are provided which can help you engage practically with **The Struggle for Global Peace**.

Acts of remembrance can uncover deep-rooted and strong emotions when thinking about the horrors of war. So, it is often helpful to engage with these acts alongside others so we can offer support to each other. However, with the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic, we need to be creative in the ways we support each other. For example, you can organise a walk – socially distanced of course – or a virtual meeting or telephone call to share your thoughts and questions together.

In the weeks following Remembrance Sunday, you could also think about organising a virtual event with your friends or church to raise awareness of actions and campaigns to bring peace to the world.

Please feel free to let us know of your creative ways of engaging in acts of Remembrance and peace-making. We would love to share your story. Contact the Walking the Way team by email at wtw@urc.org.uk, or telephone us on 020 7520 2718.

Remembering Together

In [Saving Private Ryan](#), a 1998 Hollywood film loosely based on a true story, Captain John H. Miller, played by Tom Hanks, is killed in the process of rescuing Private James Ryan. The captain's final words to the man he has been charged with rescuing are: "Earn this; earn it." The captain and his comrades have gone to great trouble to rescue Ryan, and now a life is to be lost on the battlefield for him. The captain wants assurance that it's all been worth it.

The old saying "war is hell" dates back to at least the 19th century and seems undisputable. War forces people to endure indescribably hostile environments, treacherous journeys and violence, trauma and the death of countless people who did not ask for conflict to rage in their land.

For God, the answer is clear. All life is sacred.

In [Genesis 1: 31](#), as God looks over all creation, following the introduction of human beings into the mix of land, sea, light, darkness, animals and plants, God saw that "indeed, it was very good".

However, throughout the rest of [Genesis](#), this initial image of paradise and perfection doesn't last long. Humanity is created in the image of God with the ability to choose a life of love, peace, justice and fulfilment for all creation, but also to choose power, selfishness, greed and corruption. The remainder of scripture follows a story of humanity struggling with these choices, often getting it wrong, with individuals, nations and peoples often putting themselves and their own interests above those of others. This struggle continues to this day, perhaps most visible in the persistent prevalence of conflict.

On Armistice Day and Remembrance Sunday, we take time to remember those who have sacrificed, or otherwise lost, their lives in conflict. It is clearer than ever, as we take time to remember all who have been lost, that the way of life which God hopes for us, of love and peace for all creation, is not an easy one. There are many for whom injustice is a daily reality, through no fault of their own, with little sense of hope or escape. There are many who have no choice but to fight enemies who are trying to eradicate them. For those who offer their lives to the service of their country, there is no choice in the orders they receive. If they are called to fight, they must fight. There are many who want justice but find it difficult to show mercy.

Given these challenges, it is easy to feel that what we have to offer God is not enough. In terms of our relationship with God, we do not need to "earn it". The love, grace and salvation of God are offered freely to us, not as a result of anything we've done or the status we hold, but so that all people who are created and shaped by God, may, as [John 10:10](#) says, "have life and have it to the full".

What does God expect of us mere human beings in the face of life's challenges? As the famous words of [Micah 6: 8](#) remind us:



He has shown you, O mortal, what is good.
And what does the Lord require of you?
To act justly and to love mercy
and to walk humbly with your God.

We are not asked to give what we do not have, solve every problem, or get everything right. We are only human, after all. We are called to walk humbly with our God, accepting our limitations, but, at the same time, doing everything we can in pursuit of justice and mercy. In keeping this as a priority, God promises us, that no matter how difficult things get, the Holy Spirit will always be with us to strengthen and guide us “until the end of the age” ([Matthew 28:20](#)).

It can be hard to act justly and love mercy, but everyone has the chance to make the world a better place. As we walk around our communities, go to work, shop for groceries, enjoy our hobbies, there are chances to build relationships with those around us, to show kindness, to grow our awareness of issues around us and to help find solutions to problems as they emerge in the different communities we’re part of. In making the most of these everyday opportunities, we can play our part in reducing the divisions, inequalities and injustices which fuel negativity.

As well as the personal ways we can work for peace, we can also be part of the wider global struggle, participating in the many movements and campaigns which work towards an end to war, encourage reconciliation and strives for a world in which all can live in peace. More information on how you can be a part of this can be found at the end of this booklet.

These actions may appear small and insignificant at times but, following the example of Christ, living the life of Jesus today cannot be underestimated if we want to build the world which God calls us to create. That is why we are asked to “walk humbly”, not powerfully or arrogantly, with our God. It is the small steps which ultimately lead to significant changes which will bring about the world of peace and justice which God calls us to build.



As we take time to remember the horrors of war and conflict, offering prayers for those who have died, we can also take refuge and hope in a God who is working to help those who are caught up in needless violence ([Isaiah 2:3-5](#)). We can also trust that God is actively at work through us.

So, whatever might be holding us back, making us sad or angry, making us fearful or hesitant, making us tired and weary, may the old words of Charles Wesley be true for us this day: “My chains fell off, my heart was free, I rose, went forth, and followed Thee”.

Prayers for Peace

Consider these prayers:

God of all humanity

Help us to be a people who embrace truth

And challenge those narratives that distort reality

And serve the interests of those who promote them.

Grant us the courage to challenge injustice,

The resolve to work for a fairer world

And the wisdom to recognise where our actions and inactivity

Add to the struggles of others.

As we pray for all people caught up in conflict

We ask that those who wield power and influence on our world

Might find the resolve

To truly commit themselves to bring peace and healing to all nations.

Through Christ our Lord and King

AMEN

(Produced by JPIT in 2014)

O God,

on this Day for Peace

we acknowledge with shame

our share in all that works against peace

and contributes to violence.

We profess to serve the Prince of Peace

and yet all too readily

our hearts harbour

hatred and resentment

toward those with whom we disagree;

We profess to serve the One

who urges us to 'turn the other cheek' and

'love your enemies',

and yet all too readily

we refuse to walk the hard and sacrificial

path of reconciliation.

We confess to you,

our shared responsibility for a world

in which weapons and war

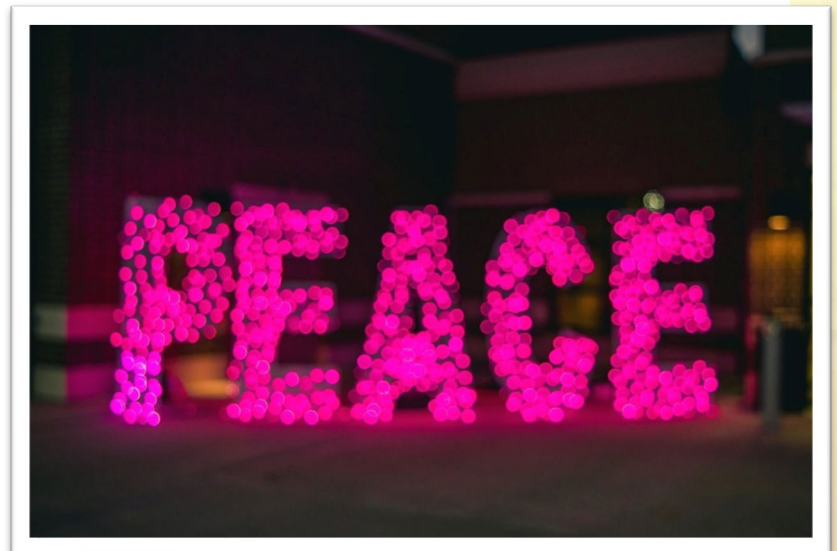
continue to wreak their havoc

and claim their victims;

our natural inclination

toward protection of 'us' and 'ours'

and our suspicion of 'them' and 'theirs'.



Forgive us and help us pledge ourselves
anew to work for a world
in which swords are beaten into
ploughshares,
and spears into pruning hooks
and where peace may flourish.

Amen

(© Geoffrey Clarke 2009)



We dare not merely pray that You end all war;
for You made us in your own image O God of Peace.

We dare not merely pray that You end starvation;
for You have blessed us with plenty, O God of Abundance.

We do not merely pray that You end all prejudice, disease, poverty and hatred.

We pray instead that You give us the strength, determination and wisdom to live as Jesus lived,
as living reminders of the coming Kin-dom.

AMEN

(© Commitment for Life 2020)

A journey through your community

If you can, take a walk around your own local area
to the local cenotaph or war memorial. If you are
not able to do this, imagine you are travelling
there or enter your postcode into [Instant Street
View](#) to take the journey virtually.

You will need:

- a Bible, to look up passages for reflection during the walk or journey
- two poppies, one to wear and one to hold before leaving at your local war memorial
- a stone, to take to a local river, pond or water source
- a laurel (or shiny) leaf, to bring out as you travel home



Begin your journey by walking to your local cenotaph or war memorial. As you walk, pray quietly for those who travel this way every day. Consider the words of John Edmonds: “When you go home, tell them of us and say, for your tomorrow, we gave our today.” In the busyness of life, we can often forget all that has gone on before us or around us. Pray that these people will also find the time to reflect on the suffering of those affected by war and seek to play their part in making a difference. Consider how you might help those around you to reflect and act.

Poppies

When you reach your local war memorial, read [Micah 6: 8](#). Take out one of your poppies. Hold it in your hand and take a moment of silence to reflect.

Poppies are often worn as a symbol of both Remembrance and hope for a peaceful future. In Scotland, they have four petals with no leaf, and in the rest of the UK they have two petals and a leaf. White poppies can also be worn to emphasise the continuing need for peace.

Looking at the first petal, remember those who have lost their lives in conflict. Pray that their families and friends will know God's loving touch and guiding hand in the difficulty and uncertainty of grief.

Looking at the second petal, remember those continuing to suffer as a result of present conflicts. Pray that God will speak the truth to those in power, making them see that war and conflict should be avoided wherever possible.

Looking at the third petal, or the leaf, remember medical personnel, support staff, charities and others who support the victims of conflict. Pray that they will have the wisdom and strength to face the horrors they must in order to save lives.

Looking at the fourth petal, or the stem, think of the tomorrows that are coming. Pray that God will remind you that in everything you do, big and small, you can help to build the word of peace and justice that God wants for all people, and be bold in doing so.

As you leave the war memorial, leave one of your poppies as a sign of respect and remembrance. Take the other with you to remember all that you have prayed for.

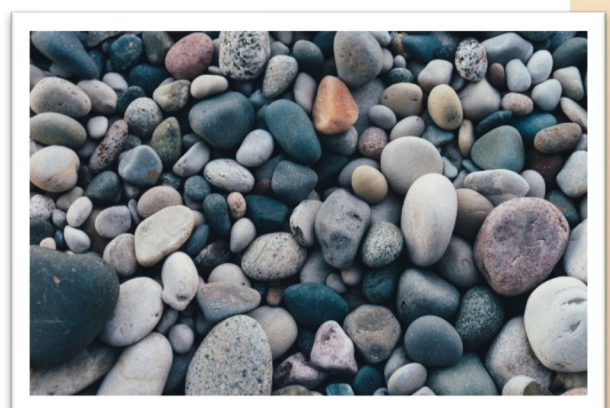


Stone

As you approach your local river, pond or water source, read [Matthew 11: 25-30](#). Take out your stone and examine it. Some stones are rugged and sharp, which reflects the pain and bitterness of life. Others are smooth as their edges have corroded over time, much like ourselves when we feel tired and worn.

As we seek to play our role in building a better world, there are many challenges and stumbling blocks to face. The stone represents your burdens, the things that weigh you down and prevent you from being fully alive or fully open to living out God's purposes.

God knows the burdens we hold, the mistakes we've made the sins we've committed, the pressures around us and the insecurities we find hard to shake off.



When you're ready, throw your stone into the water. Ask God to take your burdens and concerns, freeing you of them. Like the stone lost in the water, allow God to wash your burdens away, preparing you to live the life of Jesus more closely in your own life.

Laurel (or shiny) Leaf

As you make your way home take out your leaf and hold it as you travel. The laurel leaf represents hope and victory.

As you touch the leaf's smooth and shiny texture, think of all the good things in life that shine. Consider the kindness and love expressed, the good deeds done, the bold actions taken, the good events that have shaped your life, the community you live in, the nation, and the world.

Pray the Lord's Prayer, focusing on the line "Your Kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven".'

We may never see the fruits of our work, but we can be assured that through it, Christ has the final victory, building love and justice through everything we do in the name of Jesus.

When you get home, read [Revelation 21: 1-6](#). The building of the new heaven and new earth is happening right now, in the ways we live out our faith in our own, everyday realities. Pray that God will be with you as you continue to walk the way of Jesus.

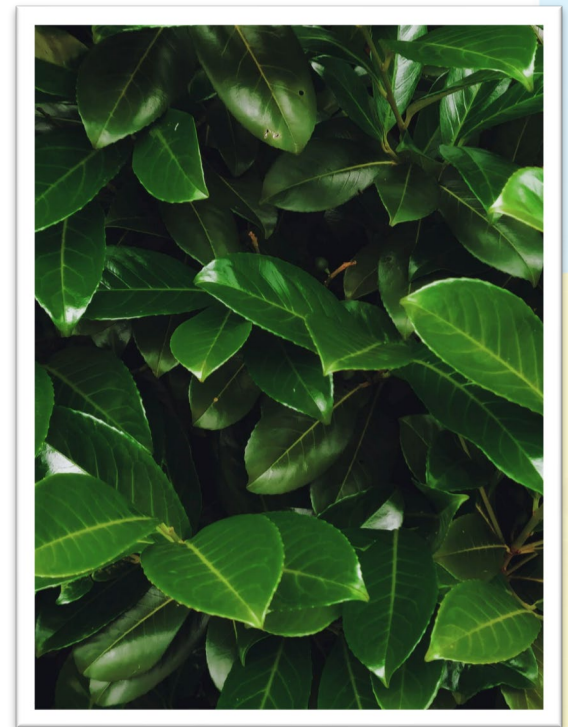
The struggle for global peace

An adapted version of the famous Serenity Prayer reads: "God, grant me the serenity to accept the people I cannot change, the courage to change the one I can, and the wisdom to know it's me."

Changing the world to bring about the peace which it so deeply needs and richly deserves must start with small actions in our own, everyday lives. [Voice of Salaam \(Voice of Peace\)](#), a non-partisan, non-political organisation made of up members of varied faith and cultural backgrounds, offers twelve principles which can help us to build peace in our lives and communities before thinking more wisely about society and the world.

As well as taking action in our own settings, it is also important to support global efforts to bring about peace and reconciliation. Here are some resources and organisations to help you engage:

- [The Joint Public Issues Team \(JPIT\)](#) unites the Church of Scotland, the Methodist Church, Baptists Together and the URC in the struggle for social justice, including peace and reconciliation, with resources, campaigns and suggestions to help you and your local church get involved.



- [Commitment for Life](#) is the URC's global justice programme, offering resources, campaigns and actions to help deal with the humanitarian effects of injustice, including conflict and war, in Bangladesh, Zimbabwe, Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories, and Central America (Honduras, El Salvador, Nicaragua and Guatemala).
- [The Fellowship of Reconciliation](#) is a community of people who are inspired by the life and teachings of Jesus Christ to oppose war and work together to build a world order based on love. The Former URC Peace Network is now officially part of this fellowship.
- [The Corrymeela Community](#) is based on the north coast of Ireland and specialises in peace and reconciliation. It aims to help people from different backgrounds and perspectives "live well together". Resources, prayers and activities are available to help you and your local church benefit from the community's extensive experience of dealing with conflict in Ireland.
- [The Society of Friends \(Quakers\)](#) is well-known for its peaceful but powerful activism in pursuit of harmony and justice for all peoples. Find resources, campaigns, advice and suggestions for making your voice count in the worldwide movement for peace and justice.
- [The Mennonite/Anabaptist network](#) is also known for its pursuit of peace. Check out the website for books and other resources to help fuel your thinking and action around peace-making.



Consider this poem from the URC's West Midlands Synod's [Walking the Way Together](#) booklet:

May we play hopscotch at checkpoints, chanting ancient skipping rhymes.
Teddy bear, teddy bear, turn around.

May we patch daisies onto khaki pockets, cultivating landing strips with seed-bombs.
Say a prayer, say a prayer, touch the ground.

May we dance freestyle at the border sharing welcome howls of laughter.
Teddy bear, teddy bear, jump up high.

May we throw petals at broken fences widening pathways for hand-crafters.
Say a prayer, say a prayer, bless our cry.

May we stroll through deserted camps picking over well-worn pointless phrases.
Teddy bear, teddy bear, bend down low.

May we spray arrows of hope and awe, spinning rainbow yarns of tenderness.
Say a prayer, say a prayer, peace may grow.

© Craig Muir 2020

The Walking the Way: Living the life of Jesus today steering group hopes that you've found this reflection and journey through your local community enriching and inspiring. We would love to hear how you got on, and if there is anything we can do to help you in your journey of discipleship with Jesus. Please the team by email at wtw@urc.org.uk or call 020 7520 2718.



Written by Martin Hayward and Simon Peters on behalf of the Walking the Way steering group
With thanks to all contributors and organisations mentioned herein.