

Remembrance Sunday 2020

Welcome to our worship today on this Remembrance Sunday. Our time of worship today will allow you to enter into the liturgy and reverence of this day. My prayer is that you find the peace of Christ in your worship time.

A **call to worship** from Matthew 7:12 - "Do for others what you would like them to do for you. This is a summary of all that is taught in the law and the prophets."

An **opening hymn** for worship today is that long time popular and favourite hymn that speaks of the God we know and love is by Isaac Watts (1674-1748) and set to the tune, St Anne –

1.
O God, our help in ages past,
Our hope for years to come,
Our shelter from the stormy blast,
And our eternal home!

2.
Under the shadow of thy throne
Thy saints have dwelt secure;
Sufficient is thine arm alone,
And our defence is sure.

3.
Before the hills in order stood,
Or earth received her frame,
From everlasting thou art God,
To endless years the same.

4.
A thousand ages in thy sight
Are like an evening gone;
Short as the watch that ends the night
Before the rising sun.

5.
Time, like an ever-rolling stream,
Bears all its sons away,
They fly forgotten, as a dream
Dies at the opening day.

6.
O God, our help in ages past,
Our hope for years to come,
Be thou art God whilst troubles last,
And our eternal home.

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Join now in this opening **prayer of approach and confession**:

Almighty God, you who reign in the highest, Lord of yesterday, today and tomorrow. Yours in the authority and power in the heaven and on the earth and the sea and we proclaim your majesty. Your love towards us is so wondrously revealed in Jesus Christ, your only begotten Son, our Saviour, and Your Spirit works in everything that is good. We acknowledge your infinite splendour, and with heart and voice we come to glorify your name.

Father, you are the great Rememberer, the one who never lets us out of the range of your love; the One who always calls to mind our needs, the One who knows our names and our deepest longings. Time after time, you have remembered your people when they have cried out in pain and distress. Your ears have never been deaf to the cries of the hungry or the shouts of the down trodden.

Forgive us that so often and so easily we do forget. We fail to remember Your sovereign transforming power, to remember you in the good times as well as the bad, to see you in the fellowship of your

Church, to count our many blessings and to recognise your hand at work in every moment of our lives.

Almighty God, through all things you remember us, help us to remember you! Remind us of all we owe, lest we forget and so we come to praise and thank you that for You, every day is a day of remembering us.

And so Lord Jesus, on this special day of remembering, bring us back in a true spirit of worship so that in hearing you speak to us, we may learn the lessons of past histories and create a present and a future which reminds us more clearly of your way for your world and all people. Amen.



We have two readings of today, the first from the Old Testament book of Numbers, 21:4-9 taken from the New International Version.

### **The Bronze Snake**

<sup>4</sup> They travelled from Mount Hor along the route to the Red Sea, to go around Edom. But the people grew impatient on the way; <sup>5</sup> they spoke against God and against Moses, and said, "Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? There is no bread! There is no water! And we detest this miserable food!"

<sup>6</sup> Then the LORD sent venomous snakes among them; they bit the people and many Israelites died.

<sup>7</sup> The people came to Moses and said, "We sinned when we spoke against the LORD and against you. Pray that the LORD will take the snakes away from us." So Moses prayed for the people.

<sup>8</sup> The LORD said to Moses, "Make a snake and put it up on a pole; anyone who is bitten can look at it and live." <sup>9</sup> So Moses made a bronze snake and put it up on a pole. Then when anyone was bitten by a snake and looked at the bronze snake, they lived.

The second reading is for the New Testament, the Gospel of John 3:14-15 and also from the NIV.

<sup>14</sup> Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, <sup>15</sup> that everyone who believes may have eternal life in him."



### **Sacrifice and Relinquishment**

Why should our focus today be on an incident that happened while the Israelites were wandering in the desert millennia ago, when we are having a hard time here and now? It isn't as if we were facing a *plague*, of snakes or anything else, but rather a *pestilence*. How then, would looking at a bronze snake on a pole help?

The New Testament reading helps bring this episode into focus. In John's gospel we hear Jesus speaking to Nicodemus, a member of the Jewish Ruling Council who visited Jesus secretly at night. During their conversation Jesus likens himself to that snake on a pole. "Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life." Yes, Jesus is thinking of his coming crucifixion and how his death will bring salvation to all peoples.

As we come to Remembrance Sunday this year, we all know we are living in strange and frightening times. Our lives have been turned upside down and inside out by the Coronavirus pandemic. In many ways we are at war with an unseen enemy. At least the Israelites were able to see the snakes that bit them!

Many of our older generation who may remember those days of 1939-45, when we were at war, the nation was asked to do difficult things as customary liberties were greatly reduced. The Government of the day enacted regulations and laws to protect the nation from the enemy. Curfews, blackout, rationing, all curtailed many of the freedoms and privileges enjoyed. The nation was in this together and each and every person had a sense of duty, care and responsibility to family, friends, neighbours and fellow citizens to keep the enemy at bay and preserve to win the war. Those were days, almost 6 years of resilience and fortitude. Sacrifices as we all know were made, that is why we have Remembrance Day, recalling with gratitude those who gave their lives in Forces, many died, many returned, some never same due to injuries, many civilians too died in the bombings. It was a horrible and difficult time that no one ever wants to live through again.

2020 began with news of a virus outbreak in the Far East. At first it seemed to far removed from us, but reality proved that to be untrue. The world was being affected. The world was at war with COVID 19. At the frontline of this war are the men and women of our NHS, they are the warriors of today, sacrificing their lives, time and all to save lives, care for those who are suffering and bring healing. Beside them there are the medical researchers and scientists desperately trying to find the weapon to fight off the virus. Isn't interesting too that the international insignia for the medical world is a snake on a pole.

The government, both UK and Scottish, have reacted and immediately asked us to make sacrifices for the greater good of all our people. Lockdown and laws were enacted to fight the unseen enemy. We were all asked to comply and it did mean making sacrifices to our customary liberties. We did and do not like making those sacrifices. If we didn't mind they wouldn't be sacrifices. Whatever our political affiliations, let us be thankful that we have governments that cared enough to try to deal with the situation. In some parts of the world governments are not even bothering to count the dead.

The lockdown months were not easy, but then I guess neither were the early years of the wars we remember today. There was no immediate end in sight as the days roll by. With the fight against Covid no immediate end is in sight. We all know how long the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> WW's lasted. It's not even a year yet since the Covid outbreak in China. I find myself asking, is this not a world war, a war against a common enemy and unseen enemy, a virological war. An enemy that we see killing our loved ones and friends, killing our economy and freedoms of movement. Killing what we knew as "normal" life. It is a war that affects us all and we all have a part to play to defeat the enemy. I see parallels to the way we had to live in those war years to the way we have to live in this pandemic war. It is a call to sacrifice if we are going to win and find any normal life again. It's hard and then when many people are ignoring the rules or openly rebelling against them, what chance is there of victory over Covid? It is very easy to blame the young people for their absurdity in going out partying in the midst of the pandemic, muttering that the youth of today have been weakened by an easy life and too much access to technology, a lack of discipline and moral fibre. Yes, there may be an element of truth in this, but, let's also remember that this is their generation's first great test of endurance. How did your generation react to *its* first great test of endurance? Even the 'greatest generation', those who fought in the Second World War, were criticised by their elders for their recklessness and immoral behaviour!

On the converse, with utmost respect, if we are, by reason of sense or age, less likely to succumb to the temptation of rebellion, we may give way to the other temptations of fear and despair. And the news is bad, there is no getting away from that. And it is hard when you live alone and there is no joy anywhere, to hide away from the world, sadly drowning in despair. I worry about what that is doing because it gives the message “we give up, we have no hope” we have no resilient, showing the generations who have never lived in those war years that with determination and oneness of mind and spirit we will not give up and be defeated. Friends I would say to us as Christians, neither of these options, rebellion or defeatism, is available to us. In the words of the splendidly militant hymn by Horatio Richmond Palmer:

“Yield not to temptation, for yielding is sin.  
Each victory will help you, some other to win.  
Fight manfully onward, dark passions subdued.  
Look ever to Jesus, He will carry you through.  
Ask the Saviour to help you  
Comfort, strengthen and keep you.  
He is willing to aid you.  
He will carry you through.”

We must fight against those temptations. As Christians we must look to the cross and the Son of Man who hung there paying, through his sinless self, for our sheer badness. Looking at him let us not EVER feel we are useless or unlovable. We are loved, we are wanted, we have been bought and paid for with a huge price. We belong to the Lord and he is not going to give up on us!

Now, I am not saying that because we are Christians we are not going to get COVID-19. It doesn't work like that. But what we can be utterly sure of is that we are in our Lord's hands whatever happens. So, if we are all soldiers in this new war: old, tired, sad soldiers as we may be, what are our instructions? Our Orders of the Day as it were. These instructions are and what they always have been:

“Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your mind and with all your strength, and Love your neighbour as yourself”.

Remember we should keep looking to Jesus, keep praying, keep reading the Scriptures and keep on helping other people. It may be that we have to show our love for our neighbour by staying away from them, but the virus doesn't travel down the phone! It is important to stay connected. There are always the agencies we can support such Foodbank and the Blytheswood Shoebox Appeal, among many other good causes. Take pleasure in little things and count your blessings, even those done in sacrifice or by relinquishment. It is only when our faith, our courage and our endurance is put to the test that we know whether they are real or not. Let us give Jesus the last word, “In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.” (John 16.33).

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In the service we hear a reading of the **Poem “2020”** written by Pam Ayres. We are grateful to Pam who granted us permission to read her poem in the church, but we cannot publish the words, from her book (in paperback), *UP IN THE ATTIC*, published by Ebury Books in August 2020.

The poem was accompanied by the church organist playing the music for the hymn “*Dona nobis pacem in terra*” as found in the *Songs of God's People* song book number 25.

Please join now for the **Act of Remembrance**

We have gathered to remember with gratitude all those who, for the sake of peace and in service of others, died for their country in time of war and in times of crisis. Let us join in prayer

Almighty God, we thank you today for all those who across the ages who have been examples of courage, for their actions, serving as an inspiration to subsequent generations. We thank you for those who have had the courage to stand up for their convictions, fighting against evil and injustice, even at the cost of their own lives. Gratefully Lord, we remember.

We thank you for those who have faced the horrors of war -those who fought bravely, served faithfully and sacrificed greatly for the cause they believed in. Gratefully Lord, we remember.

We thank you for the freedom we enjoy through their sacrifice and acknowledge again the debt we owe them. Gratefully Lord, we remember.

Holy God, we remember and thank you for all those who are working to keep things going in this present day and time of crisis: Those working in the NHS and those around it helping to keep things working. Those keeping our streets clean and collecting our rubbish, those harvesting, delivering and selling the food in our shops. Those keeping us secure and our utilities functioning. Those looking after the children of key workers, those helping to care for the elderly and vulnerable, clergy of all religions seeking to minister in these difficult times. Gratefully Lord, we remember.

Grant, Lord, that the lessons of the past may not be forgotten or the sacrifices wasted. Let us remember your continuing grace and love that holds all souls in life, and to whom none is dead but all are alive for ever. Amen.

The Tryst: "They shall not grow old, as we that are left grow old;
Age shall not weary them, nor do the years condemn;
At the going down of the sun and in the morning;
We will remember them."

Silence: For two minutes.

Kohima Epitaph: "When you go home tell them of us and say:
"For your tomorrow, we gave our today."



We join in prayer: In memory of those who died may we be better people, united with one another across the boundaries of time and space. May we be brought to a new remembrance of Christ's love and life, reflected every person who ever lived. May we live as those who are not their own but who are bought with a price that we too may be reconciled to one another and to you Father God, through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

Our Act of Commitment and Prayer:

Lord God our Father, we pledge ourselves to serve you and all humanity in the cause of justice and peace and for the relief of want and suffering. Guide us by your Spirit; give us wisdom, courage, and hope; and keep us faithful now and always, for the honour of your name.

Generous God, we rejoice in the teaching of Psalms as we strive to be more hopeful, merciful, and generous in our lives. We are committed to sharing your mighty acts with those in despair and we offer our gifts in thanksgiving and praise to your ministry across our community and world.

Lord, your love has helped your people in all ages, strengthening and guiding, urging and inspiring; love that is present in the struggles of life, yet offers hope for the future. Your love has ached, for us throughout history we ask for your love to be with us now as we ache with remembrance of past sorrow and distress of today and the concern and worries for tomorrow.

Lord, we pray for the victims of war, for those across the world who bear the scars of conflict - the injured, maimed and mentally distressed. Those who have lost their limbs, their reason or their loved ones through the horrors of war. In the selfish silence of indifference stir a thirst for justice and an end to the noise of wasteful destruction and come breathe the wisdom of reconciliation and peace in our world. Lord, in your mercy, Dona nobis pacem.

We pray for those left homeless or as refugees, those who have lost their livelihoods and security, and those who still live in daily fear for their lives. We pray for children who have been orphaned, parents who mourn their children, husbands and wives who have lost their partners, families whose lives will never be the same again. Lord, in your mercy, Dona nobis pacem.

We pray for world leaders and rulers, politicians and diplomats - those whose decisions and negotiations affect the lives of so many, and in whose hands peace ultimately lies. We hold before you the nation of America and a new President is elected that there will be a peaceful transition of governance. We bring the people of Turkey in the aftermath of the earthquake this week, and for all emergency and aid workers helping to rescue and find loved one. We pray for our own nation and the Governments as they deal with the Covid regulations and lockdowns, and for we as citizens for a rational and sensible behaviour and understanding for the love and care of our neighbour and ourselves. Lord in your mercy - Dona nobis pacem.

We pray for those in the armed forces, charged with keeping the peace in countries across the world, for aiding the civil work in our communities in times of crisis. We pray for our NHS and health care workers, those who are working on the front line in our medical services, working so hard to comfort and heal vulnerable patients who are ill with Covid-19. Protect all those looking after them, especially doctors, nurses and carers, and prevent this virus from seriously disrupting the everyday lives of our communities, cities and countries. We pray for vulnerable people to be reassured, for those facing economic pressures and job losses in this time of economic instability, please send your great comfort to those who are worried about their finances and carry many burdens and responsibilities. Lord, in your mercy, Dona nobis pacem.

Lord Jesus Christ, you taught us to love our neighbour, and to care for those in need as if we were caring for you. Help us to come alongside one another to be a neighbour who cares and shares .In this time of anxiety, give us strength to comfort the fearful, to tend the sick, and to assure the isolated of our love, and your love, and give to all your peace and wisdom at this challenging time. Lord, in your mercy, Dona nobis pacem.

Lord hear our prayer in the word you have taught us, as we say together: Our Father ...Amen.

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We conclude this worship and remembrance with the words of the hymn written by Mary Peters (1813-1856) and found in the Church Hymnary 4 at number 562.

Through the love of God our Saviour  
all will be well.  
Free and changeless is his favour;  
all, all is well.  
Precious is the blood that healed us,  
perfect is the grace that sealed us,  
strong the hand stretched forth to shield us;  
all must be well.

Though we pass through tribulation,  
all will be well.  
Ours is such a full salvation,  
all, all is well.  
Happy still in God confiding,  
fruitful, if in Christ abiding,  
holy, through the Spirit's guiding;  
all must be well.

We expect a bright tomorrow;  
all will be well.  
Faith can sing through days of sorrow  
All, all is well.  
On our Father's love relying,  
Jesus every need supplying,  
or in living or in dying,  
all must be well.

### **The Blessing**

May the blessing of the God of peace and justice be with you. May the blessing of the Son who weeps the tears of the world's suffering be with you. May the blessing of the Spirit who inspires us to reconciliation and hope be with you, now and into eternity. Amen.