

Peace Sunday 2024

Call to Worship

“God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.” Genesis 1 v31 NRSVA

Welcome to worship today. We meet in God’s House to lament pain and hurt in the world, to celebrate its potential to be good and pray for peace in a world that desperately needs it.

or

“1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2 He was with God in the beginning. 3 Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. 4 In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. 5 The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome^[a] it” John 1 v 1 - 5

Light peace candle on altar

Welcome to worship today.

We meet at a moment where the presence of war and conflict threatens to overwhelm the world. We light this candle and gather to worship, pledging to be a people of peace that bring light into a darkened world.

Opening Hymn **All People That on Earth Do Dwell**

Today is Peace Sunday, a Sunday that sits closest to the UN International Day of Peace. Christians around the country will gather and reflect together on the need to be a people of peace. This year we will be hearing stories of peace community in Colombia.

Ruby lives in the Comunidad de Paz of San Jose de Apartado, in the Uraba Antioqueno region of Colombia. Founded in 1997 it is a community committed to living a life of peace and nonviolence, while surrounded by many differences forces of war and violence.

Earlier this year Ruby travelled to the UK to meet with Politicians and share what it means to live in the community. When the Fellowship had a chance to speak with her we discovered the heart of her commitment to peace was a love of nature and the natural world.

She said “It runs in my blood being by the rivers and in nature”. She went on to say she has a favourite view in the community that looks out from the forest floor towards the mountains. She says “I love to take in the mountains, I feel at peace”.

Where have you felt at peace over this last week (invite contributions)? Are there any parts of our community – built, human or natural – that you’d like to give thanks for (invite contributions) ?

So let us pray:

God of wonder and creation!
We give you thanks and praise
For the beauty and wonder of creation.
From the smallest moth
to the largest mountain,
we give thanks for the natural world.

Into this world you placed humanity.
We give thanks for all those
who use their skills and ideas
to shape and form the
built communities in which we live.

We praise you for the beauty of nature
and the potential of humanity.

We bring our thanks and praise
knowing that we have failed to live up
to the individual or collective
potential that you placed in all of us.

We have hurt your creation through the lives that we lived
We have broken others with our words and actions
We have harmed ourselves seeking short term gain.

Into the silence that follows we bring before you
our confession:

(SILENCE)

God hears our confessions and grants peace to all who seek forgiveness.

Your sins are forgiven,

AMEN

Hymn: For the fruits of His Creation

The Peace Community in Colombia is a sacred space that often comes at great cost. It is a village community of subsistence farming families who live together in community. It exists because military and paramilitary groups had threatened to take forest land for use by multinational firms, often to lay down roads to gain quick easy access to natural resources in the area.

Their presence is a positive statement of peace, and helps others bring to life a vision for what peace could be like.

Our first reading today is an iconic passage from the prophet Micah. In a foretelling of the Kingdom, he predicts a world in which the weapons of war are transformed and everyone has a place of peace to sit:

- **Micah 4 v 1 – 5**

Living in the Peace Communities can be difficult. Remote and sometimes cut off, the communities who live there seek to serve each other and defend their land and their lives.

The Gospel reading comes in two parts. The first brings out the place of sacrifice in Jesus's ministry, and the second the place of often excluded or rejected voices:

- **Mark 9: 30-37**

What could these readings mean for us in a ministry of peace? On the one hand we have a vision of freedom and peace from Micah, yet this is counterbalanced by the betrayal of Jesus and the urging to listen to the rejected – in this case the children. Maybe we are being drawn into a ministry of peace that isn't all about big symbolic actions, but small acts that transform the world?

Hymn: Your words to me are life and health.

SERMON or REFLECTION

Leading into a World of Peace

- What does the word peace mean to you?
- It is about more than the absence of war, it is about the flourishing of life
- It is about transformation (Micah)
- As individuals and communities we can all intentionally be beacons of peace.

- The peace community in Colombia is a very visible beacon of peace. It's a rejection of violence and yet is done so at great cost to all who live there.
- International support and solidarity enables their mission to continue – including mentioning them here today. This is because by naming them they are no longer hidden.
- The reality of life in the communities is harsh. Roviro, who lives in the village said
- “Now the oppression is very intense. You feel fear. You don't want to submit to it as a feeling, so you seek refuge in the heart of the community”
- Jesus was the Prince of peace and we saw this throughout his ministry, even at cost to himself. The offer in Micah of swords into ploughshares and everyone living in peace is one of transformation and change.
- Looking around us today – what is our calling to be people of peace, even at cost or challenge to ourselves?
- Whatever our calling, we can do it together – in Fellowship with each other here, and around the globe – showing that peace is always possible, even if at times it may seem like no one wants to listen

Intercessions

Either

If possible, distribute the template 'fig leaf' to people beforehand. Or distribute at this moment.

Our prayers of Intercession pick up on the image of Micah that everyone should have their own fig tree to sit under and be afraid.

In a moment we will be praying for our church, our community, the world, places of conflict and ourselves. Before we begin I invite you to write onto your own fig leaf the person / place / situation where you wish God's peace to be felt. You will then be invited to pass/bring it forward at the start of each part of the intercession.

L: May the people and places we lift to you

All: **Know your peace and release**

Or

Structure the prayers so the prayers conclude with a verse and chorus of Look around you (can you see?)

Introduce by

L: Loving God, hear us as we sing

All: **Sing a Verse and Chorus**

Intercessions

God of every time and place

With lift before you our church community gathered here today.

We give thanks for those who bring us life and hope

and are grateful for ecumenical relationships that strengthen our witness.

We recognise that our community of hope is needed

and think of all those in our church and community whose life or circumstances

mean they are not at peace with themselves or who find the church a cause of conflict not peace.

RESPONSE

God of the powerless in a world of the powerful

We lift before you those who are oppressed by systems,
structures, people or places.

Whose lives are stuck in cycles of violence

(pause)

We think in particular of communities suffering under conflict in

Syria, Yemen, Palestine, Ukraine and many other spaces around the world.

We also bring to you those who have had to flee their home
as their place of safety becomes one of violence.
May our lives and nations demonstrate a wish to welcome the stranger
for as long as they need a space of love and support.

RESPONSE

We pray for our families and loved ones.
For fractured and broken relationships in our own lives.
For those who don't feel at peace.
For moments of regret that still shape our future.

(pause)

May your love be present,
and your peace be felt.

We bring all these prayers in the name of Jesus,
the Prince of Peace.
AMEN.

Hymn: The Kingdom of God is Justice and Joy.

Blessing

Our closing blessing comes from Jean Pierre Masamba, who lives in South Sudan:

May God, who is Master of all,
grant us each Light and Wisdom
to move forward
this week
on paths of Reconciliation
and the construction of peace
through all that we do.

Amen

Or

The Peace of the River Be With You (Iona Community)

You are invited to hold a collection in support of the Fellowship of Reconciliation – who produced the material – as part of your act of worship. The collection will be used to help continue our work of education, campaigning and creating global connections to help build a world of peace.