

**A service for Holocaust Memorial Sunday 28<sup>th</sup> January, 2024 (StF)**

**Call to worship: Jeremiah chapter 31 verse 15**

<sup>15</sup> This is what the LORD says:

"A voice is heard in Ramah, mourning and great weeping, Rachel weeping for her children and refusing to be comforted, because her children are no more." Amen.

*“Sin and death and hell shall never / O’er us final triumph gain / God is Love, so love for ever / O’er the universe must reign.” We shall sing a hymn by Rt. Revd. Timothy Rees, Bishop of Llandaff, near Cardiff. Hymn number 103, ‘God is Love: let heaven adore him;’*

**1. God is Love: let heaven adore him;**

**God is Love: let earth rejoice;**

**Let creation sing before him,**

**And exalt him with one voice.**

**He who laid the earth’s foundation,**

**He who spread the heavens above,**

**He who breathes through all creation,**

**He is Love, eternal Love.**

**2. God is Love: and he enfoldeth**

**All the world in one embrace;**

**With unfailing grasp he holdeth**

**Every child of every race.**

**And when human hearts are breaking**

**Under sorrow’s iron rod,**

**Then they find that selfsame aching**

**Deep within the heart of God.**

**3. God is Love: and though with blindness**

**Sin afflicts the souls of men,**

**God’s eternal loving-kindness**

**Holds and guides them even then.**

**Sin and death and hell shall never**

**O’er us final triumph gain;**

**God is Love: so Love for ever**

**O’er the universe must reign.**

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**Let us pray.**

Lord of all, we have come to worship you, for you made everything that exists throughout the universe and your power and wisdom are far beyond our understanding. You are good, faithful, compassionate, just, merciful, glorious, lovely, holy and truly worthy of our adoration. You understand us intimately, for you lived among us as Christ Jesus, who shared our very nature: our joys and woes, hopes and fears, our trials and temptations and who not only came to show us in words and deeds how you want us to live, but through his death and resurrection broke the power of sin and death and offers us everlasting life through faith in him. Hear us, Lord, as we sing your praises, pray to and receive your word in Jesus’ holy name. Amen.

***In our prayer of confession, when I say, ‘Merciful God’ please respond with, ‘We ask your forgiveness’.***

Merciful Lord, for the sins we have committed and for our sins of omission, for the sins of our hands and the sins of our hearts, for the hurt we have caused you and our neighbours through ignorance or indifference,

Merciful Lord ..... **We ask your forgiveness**

For our failure to see your image in somebody who is different. For putting our well-being and social comfort before the basic needs of others. For our reluctance to become involved in helping others.

Merciful Lord ..... **We ask your forgiveness**

For believing that in some way we are better than others. For fostering dislike of people whose faith, beliefs and lifestyles are different to ours. For closing our hearts to the needs of others and our failure to be a light in a world of darkness.

Merciful Lord ..... **We ask your forgiveness**

Loving heavenly Father, you offer us forgiveness freely. Help us to be as generous in all our dealings in the precious name of your Son, our Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

### ***The Lord's Prayer***

**Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name; thy kingdom come; thy will be done; on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen.**

*Our next hymn is from the United Methodist Hymnal from the USA and is sung to 'Finlandia'. It is not in "Singing the Faith". We shall sing, 'This is my song, O God of all the nations,'*

**1. This is my song, O God of all the nations,  
A song of peace for lands afar and mine.  
This is my home, the country where my heart is;  
Here are my hopes, my dreams, my holy shrine;  
But other hearts in other lands are beating  
With hopes and dreams as true and high as mine.**

**2. My country's skies are bluer than the ocean  
And sunlight beams on clover-leaf and pine;  
But other lands have sunlight, too, and clover  
And skies are everywhere as blue as mine.  
O hear my song, thou God of all the nations,  
A song of peace for their land and for mine.**

**3. This is my prayer, O Lord of all earth's kingdoms:  
Thy kingdom come; on earth thy will be done.  
Let Christ be lifted up till all shall serve him  
And hearts united learn to live as one.  
O hear my prayer, thou God of all the nations;  
Myself I give thee; let thy will be done.**

© Lloyd Stone & Georgia Harkness (to 'Finlandia' StF 419)

***Our Prayers of Intercession will deal mainly with the victims of the Holocaust, genocides and persecution. Let us pray.***

May the great name of the Lord be blessed forever. May the name of the Lord be blessed, praised, glorified, exalted and honoured, magnified and lauded by the hymns, Psalms and prayers we offer.

Lord, may your kingdom be established in truth, justice and mercy and may peace be established between all peoples on earth. Hear our prayers for our communities, for all who are sick, needy and troubled that you will stretch out your hand to help them.

We pray for all who perished in the Holocaust and following genocides, whose only crime was to be different. We pray for all victims of injustice, intolerance and persecution on grounds of race, colour, faith, politics, gender or lifestyles.

Remember in your mercy all who have died, for the loss of their goodness, their wisdom and wit, their gifts of healing, their courage and skills, their learning and laughter that died with them. We know that the world is all the poorer with their deaths and we lament for what might have been but will never be.

We pray for those whose examples of courage, decency and goodness shine out from the darkness of the years like candles of hope. We remember people who have survived holocaust and genocide, but bear the scars of physical, spiritual and mental suffering. We offer thanks for those who resisted the temptation to join the mobs of persecutors and tried to help and support the victims. They are your witnesses, sources of hope in the midst of despair.

Lord, as we acknowledge that we can be led astray by prejudice or rage, help us resist temptation to yield to cruelty and oppression. Grant us the faith and strength to fight against tyranny, prejudice and persecution day-by-day and may such times never come again, in the name of Christ Jesus, the Prince of Peace. Amen.

### **The reading is Luke chapter 10 verses 25 to 37**

<sup>25</sup> On one occasion an expert in the law stood up to test Jesus.

"Teacher," he asked, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?"

<sup>26</sup> "What is written in the Law?" he replied. "How do you read it?"

<sup>27</sup> He answered: " 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind'; and, 'Love your neighbour as yourself.' "

<sup>28</sup> "You have answered correctly," Jesus replied. "Do this and you will live."

<sup>29</sup> But he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbour?"

<sup>30</sup> In reply Jesus said:

"A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he fell into the hands of robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half-dead. <sup>31</sup> A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. <sup>32</sup> So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. <sup>33</sup> But a Samaritan, as he travelled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. <sup>34</sup> He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, brought him to an inn and took care of him. <sup>35</sup> The next day he took out two silver coins and gave them to the innkeeper. 'Look after him,' he said, 'and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.'

<sup>36</sup> "Which of these three do you think was a neighbour to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?" <sup>37</sup> The expert in the law replied,

"The one who had mercy on him." Jesus told him,

"Go and do likewise." Amen.

*We shall sing a hymn by Alan Gaunt in which the peace he prays for is shalom: not only an end to warfare, but harmony, fulfilment, prosperity, good health and the richness of God's blessing. We shall use the melody, 'Herstmonceux' from "Hymns and Psalms" number 613, as it is better than the one in "Singing the Faith". Hymn number 413, 'We pray for peace,'*

**1. We pray for peace,  
But not the easy peace  
Built on complacency  
And not the truth of God;  
We pray for real peace,  
The peace God's love alone can seal.**

**2. We pray for peace,  
But not the cruel peace  
Leaving God's poor bereft  
And dying in distress;  
We pray for real peace,  
Enriching all humanity.**

**3. We pray for peace,  
And not the evil peace  
Defending unjust laws  
And nursing prejudice,  
But for the real peace  
Of justice, truth and brotherhood.**

**4. We pray for peace,  
Holy communion  
With Christ our risen Lord  
And all humanity;  
God's will fulfilled on earth,  
And all his creatures reconciled.**

**5. We pray for peace,  
And, for the sake of peace,  
Look to the risen Christ,  
Who gives the grace we need  
To serve the cause of peace  
And make our own self-sacrifice.**

**6. God, give us peace;  
If you withdraw your love  
There is no peace for us,  
Nor any hope of it.  
With you to lead us on,  
Through death or tumult, peace will come.**

*© Alan Gaunt {born 1935}*

### **Address**

I spent a quarter of a century as a teacher-librarian at a comprehensive school in Tipton and some of my colleagues nicknamed me 'Professor Dewey' because of my ability to classify books, using the Dewey System. For example, books on mathematics are grouped in 510, chemistry in 540 and poetry 821. Classifying subjects is useful, even essential in libraries, but it is not just books that we group. We do the same with people and that can have disastrous consequences, depending how we classify. Take me, for example: I can be classed as old, bald, vertically challenged, fat, bespectacled, Methodist, heterosexual, part – Jewish and a Brummie. Some of these features can lead to others being prejudiced against me – especially as a Brummie in the Black Country, but most cannot be changed: I am who and what I am. Fortunately, I have suffered little

overt prejudice, but there are vast numbers of people, here and abroad, who have been persecuted and sometimes killed because of the way they are regarded.

Today, we remember the horrors of the Holocaust when six million Jews and millions of people deemed 'subhuman' by the Nazi Party were murdered, mainly in concentration camps, between the declaration of the 'Final Solution' in 1941 and 1945. Nazis aimed to exterminate people who were considered a threat to the Reich, not only Jews, but Roma gypsies, Slavs, Russians, people with physical or mental disabilities, LBGQTQ communities, Jehovah's Witnesses, trade unionists and Communists. The gas chambers of Auschwitz and Belsen were only a few that sought to kill 'undesirables' on industrial scales and the result was what Jews call 'Shoah' or catastrophe. It is right, therefore, that we should commemorate not only the Holocaust but Genocides that have occurred since the Second World War, notably the genocide in Rwanda thirty years ago in which more than 800000 Tutsi citizens were murdered by their Hutu neighbours in a hundred days from 6<sup>th</sup> April.

It is important we should recall these events, for the Harvard Professor, George Santayana declared, "Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it." However, as I speak, Ukraine and Russia are at war, and the Media's attention has now been grasped by the appalling conflict in Gaza with two million ordinary Palestinians sandwiched between Hamas and the Israeli Defence Force. Within our own society opinions are being polarised with accusations of 'antisemitism' on one side and 'islamophobia' on another and political leaders are being urged to punish anybody in the party who goes beyond the party line, forgetting the cost in human misery of both Israelis and Palestinians.

When Jesus was challenged by an expert in Jewish law about who his neighbour was, Jesus told the well-known parable about the Good Samaritan which is not as simple as many think it is. Christ intended it to shock his listeners in order to reveal a truth they didn't want to hear. Jews hated Samaritans more than Gentiles, who they considered beyond God's grace, for Samaritans were Israelites from the Northern Kingdom, who following defeat at the hands of Assyria in 721 BC, had intermarried with Gentiles, worshipped foreign gods and who did not accept the religious ways of Judeans.

Two religious Jews saw the naked figure on the road to Jericho, but kept a wide berth, not only because of the risk of being ambushed by bandits, but because they were going to serve at the temple and, had the figure been dead, they would have been made ritually unclean by touching him, so they wouldn't have been able to participate. Whether or not they recognized the victim as Jewish, their roles were more important to them than compassion.

The Good Samaritan would have hated Jews collectively, but when he saw the naked, injured Jew in bandit country on the road to Jericho, he saw a fellow human being, not an enemy and he was filled with pity. He sacrificed his antipathy for Jews, put himself in harm's way by stopping to tend his wounds, went out of his way to take the man to an inn where he made sure he was safe and then made a financial sacrifice by paying for his care. We don't know whether or not the experience changed the mind-set of either the Samaritan or Jew, but I would hope their views would have softened.

A political answer to the current situations is as far away as it ever was, but Jesus had the answer two thousand years ago: **Love each other**. It does not mean sharing the same faith, politics, gender, race, social group or outlook, but seeking justice and mercy in our dealings with one another, even if it means making sacrifices in the process.

Although it may seem counter-intuitive, we ought to resist the temptation to classify our neighbours, rather than seeing their needs and addressing them.

John Wesley preached God's grace for all, not just a privileged few; each one of us is made in God's image and is loved to the uttermost by the Lord, so we have a duty to stand up for the despised and disfranchised, not ignore them. It is a sobering thought that, as human beings we have the capacity to hate as well as to love, so a genocide could, heaven forbid, occur in this country if the conditions allowed it to – if no one spoke out. Remember Pastor Martin Niemoller's sobering words against inaction in the face of tyranny: **First they came for the socialists, and I did not speak out—because I was not a socialist. Then they came for the trade unionists, and I did not speak out—because I was not a trade unionist. Then they came for the Jews, and I did not speak out—because I was not a Jew. Then they came for me—and there was no one left to speak for me.**

We are called to preach the good news of reconciliation between God and humankind and to do so fearlessly. To do so, we must see the individual rather than a group, faction, label, or nation, for the Good Shepherd knows us by name as sheep of his pasture, not just a general flock. This means we should avoid the trap of taking sides, rather than calling out wrongdoing and seeking humane, just conduct on both sides. Lord Donald Soper was a fierce opponent of Axis powers during the Second World War, but he spoke out fearlessly against the R.A.F policy of blanket-bombing German cities, because of the terrible cost in civilian lives. His views were unpopular with the Establishment, but they made many people question the moral conduct of conflicts. Whatever our personal or political views, may Christ give us the courage to proclaim our common humanity and the need for justice and reconciliation. Amen.

*We conclude our worship as we sing Sebastian Temple's paraphrase of a prayer by St. Francis of Assisi. Hymn number 776, 'Make me a channel of your peace.'*

**1. Make me a channel of your peace.**

**Where there is hatred, let me bring your love;**

**Where there is injury, your pardon, Lord;**

**And where there's doubt, true faith in you. *Chorus:***

*O Master, grant that I may never seek*

*So much to be consoled as to console;*

*To be understood as to understand;*

*To be loved, as to love with all my soul.*

**2. Make me a channel of your peace.**

**Where there's despair in life, let me bring hope;**

**Where there is darkness, only light;**

**And where there's sadness, ever joy: *Chorus:***

**3. Make me a channel of your peace.**

**It is in pardoning that we are pardoned,**

**In giving unto all that we receive,**

**And in dying that we're born to eternal life.**

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***Benediction***

The peace of God which passes all understanding, keep *our* hearts and minds in the knowledge and love of God and of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord; and the blessing of God, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, remain with *us* always. **Amen.**