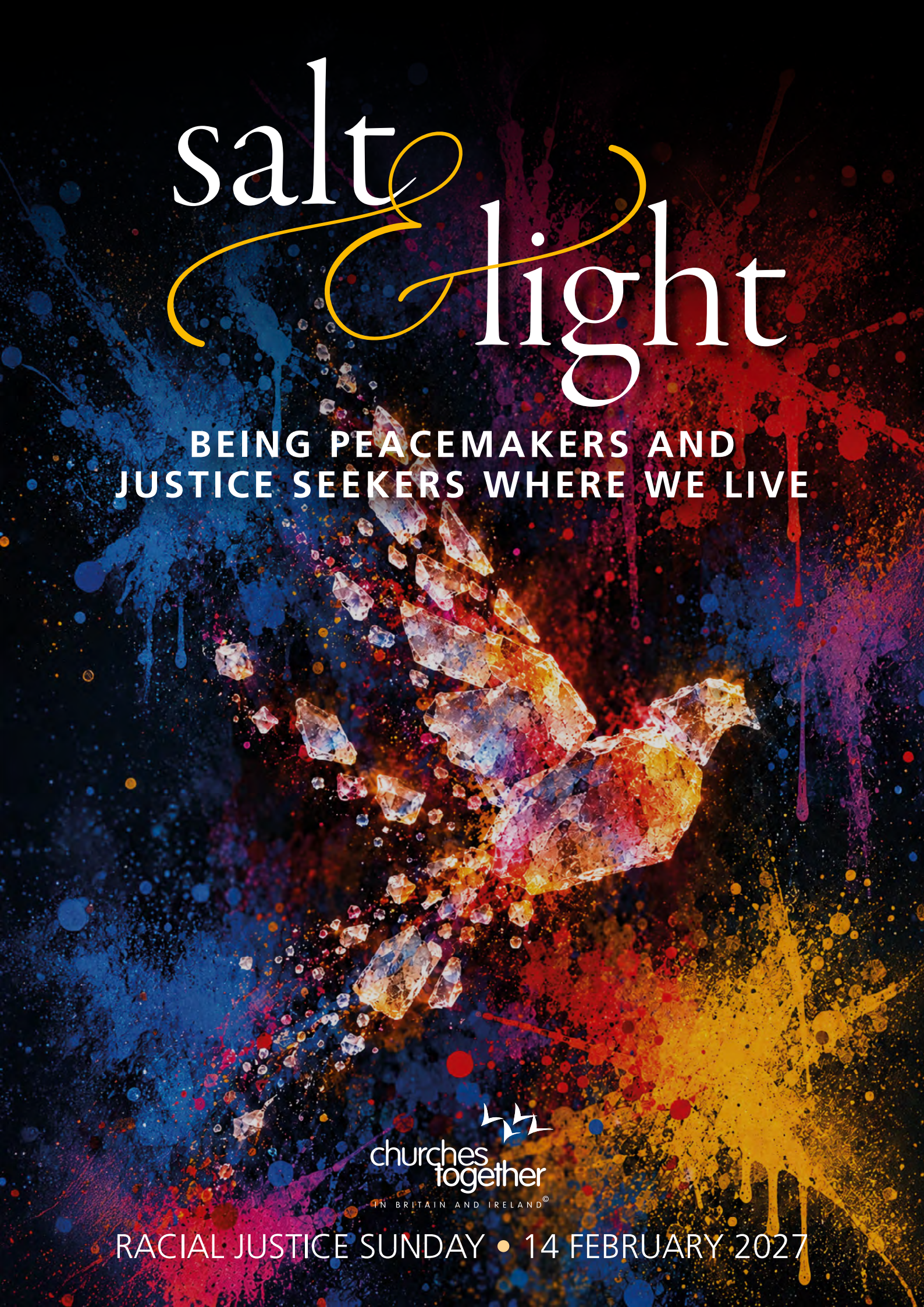
salt & light

BEING PEACEMAKERS AND JUSTICE SEEKERS WHERE WE LIVE



churches together
IN BRITAIN AND IRELAND©

RACIAL JUSTICE SUNDAY • 14 FEBRUARY 2027

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Interchurch House
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+44 (0) 20 3794 2288 (phone)
info@ctbi.org.uk
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salt & light

BEING PEACEMAKERS AND JUSTICE SEEKERS WHERE WE LIVE

RACIAL JUSTICE SUNDAY 14.02.27

YOU ARE THE SALT OF
THE EARTH, BUT IF SALT
HAS LOST ITS TASTE,
HOW CAN ITS SALTINESS
BE RESTORED? IT IS
NO LONGER GOOD
FOR ANYTHING BUT
IS THROWN OUT AND
TRAMPLED UNDER FOOT.

Matthew 5:13

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Racial Justice Sunday Writers' Group

MINISTER SHERMARA FLETCHER-HOYTE



Minister Shermara Fletcher-Hoyte is the Principal Officer at Churches Together in England for Pentecostal, Charismatic and Multicultural Relations. She also has responsibility for racial justice and young adult ecumenical engagement.

A dedicated minister and international speaker, Shermara is committed to fostering holistic and flourishing lives. Her leadership was notably highlighted when she read before a global audience of 4.1 billion at Queen Elizabeth II's funeral on 19 September 2022. Shermara's expertise and passion have led to her speaking on platforms such as BBC Radio 2, BBC Radio 4, BBC World News, Talk TV, The God Channel, TBN, UBC Radio and Premier Radio.

She is also a writer, contributing to works such as *Young, Woke, and Christian*,[i] *Coming Home: Christian Perspectives on Housing*,[ii] *Black, Christian and Single*,[iii] and *Anglicans and Pentecostals in Dialogue*.[iv]

DENZIL JOHN



Denzil John is a retired Baptist minister who lives in Caerffili and was the minister of Tabernacle Welsh Baptist Church in the Hayes, Cardiff. He has served on many denominational and inter-denominational panels and committees over the decades. He has served on Christian Aid Committees in Wales and in the rest of the UK, and is currently a member of the board of trustees of Cardiff Baptist College. Denzil is also a poet and hymn writer, and enjoys music, acting and gardening. He hails from Pembrokeshire and is a keen Welsh historian.

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i Victoria Turner (ed), *Young, Woke and Christian: Words from a Missing Generation* (SCM Press, 2022).

ii Graham Tomlin and Malcolm Brown (eds), *Coming Home: Christian Perspectives on Housing* (Church House Publishing, 2020).

iii Marcia Dixon (ed), *Black Christian and Single: A Collection of Essays about Singleness in Britain's Black Pentecostal Church* (MTD Publishing, 2022).

iv David Hilborn and Simo Frestadius (eds), *Anglicans and Pentecostals in Dialogue* (Wipf and Stock, 2023).



JUSTIN LAU

Justin Lau was born in Singapore, raised in Japan and is now based in the UK where he studied for an MA in English Literature and an MA in Theology and Ministry. He seeks to be a bridge between the East and the West, and is passionate about what the western church can learn from East Asian theologies. He writes a Substack newsletter called 'Decolonising My Faith' about his journey to integrate his faith with his East Asian culture and heritage. He lives with his wife in London where he is Worship and Discipleship Year Pastor at All Saints' Woodford Wells.



PHILL MELLSTROM

Phill Mellstrom is the Worship Development Worker for the Church of Scotland. He is an accomplished musician, a gifted songwriter and a published author. He is the co-editor of the recently published *God Welcomes All*, a supplement to the Church of Scotland's popular hymn book, the *Church Hymnary Fourth Edition*. This new collection features more than 200 hymns and songs in a wide range of styles by writers from Scotland and around the world. Phill is also a member of the Joint Liturgical Group, which is concerned with the demands of worship in Britain and the development of common liturgical thinking and texts in the worldwide Church.



REVD MANDY RALPH

Formerly a nurse, the Revd Mandy Ralph spent five years as an Ordained Local Minister before becoming a full-time Minister of Word and Sacrament in the Church of Scotland when she was inducted to the linked charges of Annbank and Tarbolton in South Ayrshire in 2019. She sits on the Church of Scotland's Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Group.



DR RICHARD REDDIE

Richard Reddie is Director of Justice and Inclusion at Churches Together in Britain and Ireland. He is a writer, researcher, cultural and religious commentator and broadcaster and is the author and editor of several books, including *Race for Justice: The Struggle for Equality and Inclusion in British and Irish Churches*, a collection of 14 essays on racial justice in the different churches (Lion/SPCK, 2022), *Abolition! The Struggle to Abolish Slavery in the British Colonies* (Lion Hudson, 2007) and *Black Muslims in Britain* (Lion Hudson, 2009).

REVD LORRAINE SHORTEN



Lorraine Shorten is a minister for the Moravian Church of the British Province and serves two congregations in the Bath and Somerset area. She trained for ordained ministry as a mature student but has served the church in many roles throughout her life. Her first call to ministry was serving two congregations, one in inner-city Birmingham and a rural one in Leominster; these diverse settings gave her a good understanding of the many joys and challenges of ministry. She is an Ecumenical officer for the Moravian Church and a member of the Churches Together in England Racial Justice Working Group. She enjoys being creative not just in her spare time but also in her ministry by encouraging people to experience God through creation and creative activities. She also loves the Godly Play approach to learning and leads regular sessions with children and adults.

FR PHIL SUMNER



Fr Phil Sumner is currently the Parish Priest of Our Lady and St Patrick's Parish, Oldham. He is a trustee of the Catholic Association for Racial Justice and of the Oldham Interfaith Forum. In September 2006, he was named in a British national newspaper as among the top 50 British 'campaigners, thinkers and givers transforming our world' (*The Independent*'s 'Good list', 1 September 2006). He has lectured for UNESCO (Catalonia) on intercultural mediation processes in Barcelona, and in Brazil at the World Conference on the Development of Cities. He has twice been a witness on BBC 4's *The Moral Maze*, once on the subject of multiculturalism and once on the decolonisation of the university curriculum.

REVD DR MAITHRIE WHITE-DUNDAS



Revd Dr Maithrie White-Dundas is an ordained minister in the Church of Ireland. She is a member of the Ethnic Diversity, Inclusion and Racial Justice committee set up and chaired by the Most Revd John McDowell, Primate of All Ireland. She also serves on the Board of Contemporary Christianity, Northern Ireland. She did her doctorate in Cultural Studies in Nottingham, during which she set up and chaired the UK National Christian Postgraduate Conference, a post she held for 15 years. She was Head of the English Department in the University of Jayewardenepura, Sri Lanka. She is married to Paul Dundas and they have one dog. She enjoys gardening, music, dancing and comedy. She walks, reads extensively and writes poetry, fiction and articles (including for *The Church of Ireland Gazette*).

Introduction

By Dr Richard Reddie, Director of Justice and Inclusion, CTBI

Welcome to this year's Racial Justice Sunday (RJS) resources, which have the title 'Being Peacemakers and Justice Seekers Where We Live'. This is very much a call for Christians and churches to explore what it means to pursue these virtues in the places and spaces where they reside.

It goes without saying that our world is sadly overburdened by war and conflict. What used to be described as the world's 'four continents' are awash with war or 'rumours of wars' (Matthew 24:6), leading to the perception that war, rather than peace, is the natural order of things. As a follower of Jesus Christ, as well as an admirer of Revd Dr Martin Luther King Jr, I could never subscribe to the latter notion. However, to paraphrase Dr King, we do live in a world where people study war, instead of investing in peace. Yet we are called by Jesus, the Prince of Peace, to be peacemakers (Matthew 5:9). As such, it is appropriate that we focus on effecting peace in those places where there is conflict, via our prayers and commensurate actions.

The last decade has witnessed the inexorable rise of populist and ethno-nationalism on the UK's shores, and this now has a 'Christian' dimension. As a consequence, a range of protests, some of which have turned violent, have taken place that have targeted asylum seekers, refugees and anyone categorised as 'migrants' or 'foreigners'. The rationale for such dissent is many and varied, and ranges from protecting our women and children (from migrants and foreigners) to safeguarding Britain and Ireland's Judeo-Christian heritage. The latter has seen the brandishing of flags and Christian symbols at various protests and demonstrations, and the emergence of groups who describe themselves as 'Christian' patriots. What is beyond doubt is the fact that such behaviours and activities have created division, rancour and enmity within our already fractious society.

It is within this context that the RJS resources are asking Christians to be 'salt and light' where they live; people who, in the well-known words of the noted Catholic friar St Francis of Assisi, are 'channels of [God's] peace'. We need to be people who disavow any ideas or ideologies, irrespective of whether they come from apparent Christians, that fail to espouse love, compassion, mercy and dignity.

I mentioned Dr King earlier. His vision for the USA when it was still practising state-sponsored racial segregation was that of a Beloved Community. This would be a society in which people from every race, every nation, every religion and every ethnic background would be respected, and where their human dignity would be affirmed. It would be a society where people were able to disagree without fear, particularly when it comes to injustice; a society that believes that human beings can be reconciled, can evolve and can come together without violence or division. The cornerstones of such a society would be peace (non-violence), justice, love, dignity, truth and equality. Such a focus on peace is commensurate with one for justice.

They say that confession is good for the soul, and, much to my parent's chagrin, as a young man I used to listen to the music of the late, great reggae singer Peter Tosh. Tosh, who sang with Bob Marley in the original dispensation of the Wailers, was a Rasta man who was no fan of the church, and had some choice words to say about the way 'Christianity' had been foisted on Black people. Yet one of his best songs, 'Equal Rights', argued that there could not be peace without justice and equal rights. For Tosh, without justice, peace was full of meaningless platitudes, and he went on to argue that peace is something you receive after death (i.e., the 'rest in peace' notification on a person's gravestone).



I would argue that those who clamour for peace but have no desire to see justice enacted to right inherent wrongs are really focused on maintaining an often-corrupt form of 'order'. Peace, akin to justice, is borne out by actions. While you can talk about peace – or have 'peace talks' – the words must lead to substantive action if they are to have any meaningful impact. It is a case of actions speaking louder than words! With that being the situation, what should our actions be as peacemakers and justice seekers?

"We need to be people who disavow any ideas or ideologies, irrespective of whether they come from apparent Christians, that fail to espouse love, compassion, mercy and dignity...."

This year, RJS coincides with Valentine's Day, a day invariably associated with love and all things romantic. However, it can be argued that 'love' and 'justice' themselves, the rationale for RJS, are akin to two sides of the same coin. The US philosopher Cornel West argued that 'justice is what love looks like in public', and the Scriptures are replete with verses that demonstrate that our God is a God of justice and love. So, love and justice complement each other and are pivotal aspects of the gospel, and I am juxtaposing love and justice to make the theological argument that it is both possible and commensurate to focus on both love and justice on RJS/Valentine's Day; there is no reason to have a binary approach to this.

What is more, I am pleased that the material found in this year's resources enable Christians to explore the threefold nexus between justice, peace and love via prayers, liturgies, homilies and sermons, reflections, hymns, worship songs and prayers. As usual, this material reflects Churches Together in Britain and Ireland's four nations' approach of church-related engagement.

I would like to thank the members of the Racial Justice Sunday Writers' Group whose thoughts, prayers, ideas, inspiration and writing have resulted in these resources.

Finally, I would like to end by paraphrasing a quote from a good friend who suggested that nothing of any lasting worth can be built on hate, because hate is like sand; it is impossible to build anything permanent on it, as the winds of love and waters of justice will blow and wash it away respectively. As Jesus suggested, the wise person built their house on the rock, which is our Lord of love, and nothing could move it (Matthew 7:24-25)!

FAITHFULNESS WILL
SPRING UP FROM
THE GROUND,
AND RIGHTEOUSNESS
WILL LOOK DOWN
FROM THE SKY.

Psalm 85.11


SECTION ONE
WORSHIP MATERIAL
PHILL MELLSTROM

PRAYERS FOR JUSTICE AND PEACE

Peace be with you! But what does it mean to know peace, or to be at peace? What does it look like to make peace or to find peace? Often it is described as the absence of war, or when we no longer fear – but what does it mean to imagine and experience peace in terms of what is *present*? Let us not devalue peace, for it is the higher ideal and the hope that we long for and pray for.

As we use these prayers together it is important to recognise the need for a peace that is full and present – for ourselves and between each of us. As we seek to reconcile what we have broken and torn apart through racism, violence and hate, we long for what is described in Psalm 85:

> LORD, you were favourable to your land;
> you restored the fortunes of Jacob.
> You forgave the iniquity of your people;
> you pardoned all their sin.
> You withdrew all your wrath;
> you turned from your hot anger.
> Restore us again, O God of our salvation,
> and put away your indignation towards us.
> Will you be angry with us for ever?
> Will you prolong your anger to all generations?
> Will you not revive us again,
> so that your people may rejoice in you?
> Show us your steadfast love, O LORD,
> and grant us your salvation.
>
> Let me hear what God the LORD will speak,
> for he will speak peace to his people,
> to his faithful, to those who turn to him in their hearts.
> Surely his salvation is at hand for those who fear him,
> that his glory may dwell in our land.
>
> Steadfast love and faithfulness will meet;
> righteousness and peace will kiss each other.
> Faithfulness will spring up from the ground,
> and righteousness will look down from the sky.
> The LORD will give what is good,
> and our land will yield its increase.
> Righteousness will go before him,
> and will make a path for his steps.

As we pray and discern together, letting the Holy Spirit bring alive our imaginations and our feelings to guide us – how might we make real a peace that dismantles racism, dignifies one another and celebrates difference and diversity?

> May God's Kingdom of justice and peace come, and God's will be done on earth as in Heaven. Lord, in Your mercy, hear our prayers.

PRAYERS TO GATHER

OPENING PRAYER

Loving and living God,
You created all of life in Your wisdom.
As we come together in celebration and concern on this Racial Justice Sunday,
may we bless and give thanks for the beauty and diversity of all Your children,
may we learn from our differences and grow in our understanding of each other,
may we build upon our existing unity and work together for peace and reconciliation,
may we be courageous in honouring dignity, tireless in pursuing justice
and dedicated to making peace.
May we be united in Your praise this day, as we worship together as kindred
with a shared purpose and desire.
Amen

OPENING PRAYER

God of all life,
You gather us together in Your generosity,
each one a child of God – lovingly imagined and given breath by You.
In Your wisdom, You crafted us – unique, different, beautiful.
In Your grace, You empower us – gifted, creative, blessed.
In Your mercy, hear our prayers – for ourselves, for others, for our world.
We ask now that You would join our diverse and distinctive voices together
in one song of praise to You.
Amen

PRAYER

Our Maker
who dwells in all places –
may Your name be glorified in all we do
and in every corner of the earth.
May we find all that we need to flourish
and share it with all whom we meet.
Remind us not to seek too much,
but to be joyful in our 'enough'!
Lead us towards one another in love
and keep us from violence and hate.
Bind us together in peace and unity –
that we might courageously seek for Your Kingdom to come
and Your will to be done,
so all may know Your peace and love unending.
Amen



PRAYERS TO SEEK FORGIVENESS

A PRAYER TO CONFESS

(Inspired by Revd Dr Martin Luther King Jr)

God of justice and mercy,
we come to You now,
recognising that we are people who sin – who need forgiveness;
who live in communities that are hurting – who need healing;
and in a world that does not know peace – which needs justice.
In Your mercy, will You hear our prayers:

When our eyes do not see the gravity of racial justice,
Shake us from our slumber and open our eyes, O Lord.

When out of fear we are frozen into inaction,
Give us a spirit of bravery, O Lord.

When we try our best but say the wrong things,
Give us a spirit of humility, O Lord.

When the chaos of this dies down,
Give us a lasting spirit of solidarity, O Lord.

When it becomes easier to point fingers outwards,
Help us to examine our own hearts, O Lord.

God of truth, in Your wisdom, enlighten us.
God of hope, in Your kindness, heal us.
Creator of all people, in Your generosity, guide us.
Amen

A PRAYER FOR FORGIVENESS FOR WHAT WE COULD HAVE BEEN, BUT FAILED TO BE

(Inspired by Revd Dr Martin Luther King Jr)

O thou Eternal God,
out of whose absolute power and infinite intelligence the whole universe has come into being,
we humbly confess that we have not loved thee with our hearts, souls and minds and we have not loved our neighbour as Christ loved us.
We have all too often lived by our own selfish impulses
rather than by the life of sacrificial love as revealed by Christ.
We often give in order to receive.
We love our friends and hate our enemies.
We go the first mile but dare not travel the second.
We forgive but dare not forget.
And as we look within ourselves,
we are confronted with the appalling fact that the history of our lives
is the history of an eternal revolt against You.
But thou, O God, have mercy upon us.
Forgive us for what we could have been but failed to be.

Give us the intelligence to know Your will.
Give us the courage to do Your will.
Give us the devotion to love Your will.
In the name and spirit of Jesus we pray.
Amen





PRAYERS FOR JUSTICE

(Inspired by Revd Dr Martin Luther King Jr)

God, there can be no peace without justice,
so we ask You now to let Your justice roll like mighty water.
Your justice, O God, is not one of vengeance;
it is neither violent nor vicious;
rather, it is righteous, it is life giving
and it is filled with grace and mercy.

In Your grace and mercy, Lord:

Grant us courage,
to face injustice and work towards the end of racism and discrimination.

Grant us faith,
to believe that unity and peace are possible.

Grant us Your power,
that we may tirelessly work for justice and for Your Kingdom to come.

Grant us tenacity,
that we continue to be gracious and merciful to all of Your dear children.

Racism breaks Your heart;
break our hearts for what breaks Yours, O Lord.

Ever-present God,
You called us to be in relationship with one another
and promised to dwell wherever two or three are gathered.
In our community, we are many different people;
we come from many different places,
have many different cultures.

Open our hearts,
that we may be bold in finding the riches of inclusion
and the treasures of diversity among us.
We pray in faith.
Amen

PRAYER

Lord, You hear every voice.
Those who speak out against injustices that they see and recognise as such.
You know our hearts, You know our situations,
and may You, and You alone, bring forth justice;
justice that sweeps through like water,
cleansing our very souls, and all the places that need to be renewed and refreshed.
Purge us of any harmful thoughts and desires towards others with waves of Your mercy.
Instil in us a deep appreciation for Your wisdom in creating all people
in the diverse beauty that represents Your image and Your heart.
Let us not nurse our wrath to keep it warm, but let it go,
and place it in Your loving and pierced hands.
Father, forgive us, for we know all too well what we have said and left unsaid,
what we have done and left undone.

Lord, have mercy,
Christ, have mercy,
Lord, have mercy.
Amen





PRAYERS FOR PEACE, JUSTICE AND UNITY

PRAYER

In the beginning there was chaos.
Yet You – God of all creation – brought order and peace with a word.

In our lives, Lord, there is often turmoil within.
Yet You – God of all comfort – can bring order and peace with a word.

In our communities, Lord, there is hurt and division.
Yet You – God of grace and mercy – can bring unity and peace with a word.

In our world, Lord, there is so much unrest and injustice.
Yet You – God of all righteousness – can bring justice and peace with a word.

Oh God, will You teach us that word,
that word that brings order, peace and justice.
In Your mercy, help us to be the peacemakers You long for us to be.
In Your mercy, help us to be the workers for justice.
In Your mercy, help us to walk humbly with one another.

God who speaks life and love over all,
we seek now the peace that surpasses all understanding,
for ourselves:

In a moment of stillness, we ask God for those things that may lead us towards an inner peace.

for our families and all whom we know and love:

In a moment of stillness, we ask God for those things that may bring peace.

for our communities:

In a moment of stillness, we ask God for those things that may bring peace.

for all creation:

In a moment of stillness, we ask God for those things that may bring peace.

Lord, in Your mercy,
hear our prayers.
Lord, in Your grace,
speak peace into this world.
Amen

A PRAYER FOR UNITY

God of all,
in Your mercy, unite us.
By Your Spirit, guide us and form us
into citizens of Your Kingdom,
a family of Your dear children –
lovers of mercy,
doers of justice,
who humbly care for each other
and work for peace and dignity for all.
Amen

A SUNG PRAYER FOR JUSTICE AND PEACE: LORD, YOU HEAR THE CRY (LORD HAVE MERCY) BY GERALDINE LATTY – RESOUND WORSHIP

Peace can be known in many different ways, but also there are many different circumstances that can steal peace from us. We may know these situations for ourselves, but this prayer asks for help as we consider: How might families who worry about where their next meal is coming from, know peace?; How might people who find themselves in distress, through threat or crisis, know peace?; How might we find real ways of working towards the peace that surpasses all understanding being real and accessible to all people? We long for a peace that is tangible in ways that mean there is an end to hatred and violence; where racism is no longer a reality; where, rather, there is unity and all people can truly flourish and live with dignity and honour.

PRAYER

Break the heavens, Lord.
You said the poor are not forgotten.
Let Your justice roar
in mighty waves across the earth.
Come and whisper peace,
O God of generous compassion.
Lord, have mercy on us.
Lord, have mercy on us.

This is what we seek, Lord,
and as we sing,
hear our cries as we lift our voices to You.
Hear our cries as we long for peace –
peace in our conflicted hearts,
peace in our divided communities,
peace throughout our country.

Hear us now as we sing our prayers to You… *[sing together or listen to the song]*
Lord, you hear the cry (Lord have mercy) by Geraldine Latty – Resound Worship

Lord, hear our prayers,
and bless us with the vision of how to make Your Kingdom of love and peace a reality in our own lives, in our communities and for all of creation. **Amen**



A PRAYER AGAINST WAR

ALMIGHTY GOD!
Your power is beyond our understanding.
By Your very breath, chaos was tamed and stilled.
The order of the universe – nuanced, diverse and good – was brought into being,
not with labour pains, not with destruction or violence,
but by Your word creation was brought forth into balance, harmony and peace.

Your power, O God, so mighty, yet so just and so beautiful.
Oh, how we have sinned against it.
Oh, how we have tarnished and sullied its beauty.

We choose to make war all too often over peace.
When there is chaos and conflict –
within ourselves, as we wrestle with our sinful choices;
within our families and communities, as we disagree and divide;
within our country, as we castigate and condemn, dehumanise and blame;
within our world, as we support conflicts with ill-informed choices;
as we turn away from injustice in apathy;
as we deny genocide and become complicit through saying and doing nothing –

Father, forgive us when we do not know the depth of what we do.

Father, forgive us when we know all too well what we are doing.

In Your mighty name –
God of all, God of justice, Sovereign Lord, Prince of Peace –
we cry out for an end to hatred,
we cry out for an end to violence,
we cry out for an end to racism and bigotry,
we cry out for an end to injustice and an end to war.

May there be deep peace –
the deep peace of the running wave,
the deep peace of the flowing air,
the deep peace of the quiet earth,
the deep peace of the shining stars,
the deep peace of the gentle night,
the deep peace of Christ,
of Christ the light of the world.

Deep peace of Christ to you
deep peace of Christ to this world,
now and for ever.
Amen

PRAYERS FOR OTHERS

Often when we pray, we can be so concerned about how people might react that we can gloss over the difficult aspects of current events. In this prayer we intentionally use provocative language, leaving space for the congregation to react and to allow honest prayers to form in response.

** You know your people and can decide whether it is more appropriate to leave spaces of silence for people to pray silently, or to invite people to speak out their prayers, as they offer their prayers to God in response to the prompts below.*

PRAYER

God of all creation,
Breather of Life, Speaker of Creation,
Storm Calmer, Justice Bringer, Whisperer and Cedar Shatterer:
You are the Lord, and You are the one who will judge the nations.

God of life and love, God with us and God with them.
God of no man's land, God of land and sea and all the earth,
God of the spaces in between:
we bring before You now our prayers for justice and peace.
We bring them in response to these words that provoke reaction and possibility:

We hear words of violence, violence of all kinds. Physical threats, cruelty, brutality, bloodshed, assaults, fighting, attacks, conflicts, war and genocide...

Lord, in our fear, we offer our prayers to You now...

** Hold silence or invite people to speak out as you sense what is the most appropriate.*

When we hear words of hate, 'sticks and stones that break bones', names and slurs and words that dehumanise, taunts and jeers – 'Not from around here ... immigrants ... stealing our jobs,' and so on – racism, naivety, negative intention...

Lord, in our anger, we offer our prayers to You now...

** Hold silence or invite people to speak out as you sense what is the most appropriate.*

When we encounter marches and protests; angry mobs and communities divided; people displaced, dehumanised and degraded; boats of every shape and size; flags raised and identity weaponised...

Lord, in our fervour, we offer our prayers to You now...

** Hold silence or invite people to speak out as you sense what is the most appropriate.*



There are so many things, Lord, that get in the way of justice and peace.
We let our minds imagine the circumstances and situations that cause fear and chaos and oppression, and so we pray now for peace...
Lord, in our hope, we offer our prayers to You now...

** Hold silence or invite people to speak out as you sense what is the most appropriate.*

We remember, Lord, that each and every one of Your children is a human being, loved and cherished by You – the people we love, the people we hate and the people we fear...

Lord, in our love and compassion, we offer our prayers to You now...

** Hold silence or invite people to speak out as you sense what is the most appropriate.*

For prayers felt,
for prayers imagined,
for prayers cried,
for prayers held back,
for all we have said or left unsaid:

Lord, in Your mercy,
know our prayers.
Lord, in Your mercy,
hold our prayers.
Lord, in Your mercy,
hear our prayers.
Amen

PRAYER

God of justice,
we call on Your strong name to bring peace in our world.
Peace on earth and good will to all is not a pipe dream that we simply wish for.

God of all people,
we claim peace, peace for this time and for all the places of the world.
We recognise that peace can be hard won, that peace can be fragile,
but we ask not merely for ceasefires and deals brokered.
No, God, we want more than that!
We ask that all of Your dear children be met with dignity,
that they have the opportunity to flourish,
and that no system or privilege would steal that away.
In the name of Jesus, the Prince of Peace, we cry out for justice.
Bring an end to hate, to the hatred that would make *difference* a weapon,
the hatred that would discriminate because '*they* don't sound like us or look like us'.

Almighty God, You alone are the judge of nations.
You alone know our hearts and every strand of DNA.
Knit us together, that we might be the people You made us to be.
May we learn from our neighbours – walking humbly towards them to embrace one another in love.
May we do justly – working together to remove unjust power where it has been taken and weaponised and used to control.
May we love mercy – speaking and acting in compassion towards all whom we meet and especially those who seek refuge.

We do this, Lord, not only because we might unknowingly entertain angels,
but when we pay close enough attention,
we meet You, our dear Christ, in the other.

In the name of the Father, of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,
and for the flourishing of all the children of God,
we cry for peace,
we pray for peace,
we sing for peace.
Amen



INTERCESSION IN RESPONSE TO EACH LINE OF THE LORD'S PRAYER

You may wish to project the lines of the Lord's Prayer line by line as this prayer is led so that people can follow the prompts and join together in praying.

Our Father in heaven,
not just my Father, but ours – every single one of us,
not distant, but here – may we know Your presence with us, Father of all.

Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be Your name.
May we recognise You, Lord, in all that we do, and give You glory,
the glory worthy of Your powerful name.

Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be Your name.
Your kingdom come,
Your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.
May we know Your way and understand Your dream for all people, O God.
Strengthen and guide us as we work together to make a better future for all.

Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be Your name.
Your kingdom come,
Your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
We pray not for bread for tomorrow, but for today.
Help us, generous God, to know when enough is enough!
Not too much or more than we need, for that is how we got here.
In our greed, jealousy and wanting what is not ours,
we sow the seeds of conflict and undo Your peace.

Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be Your name.
Your kingdom come,
Your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins,
as we forgive those who sin against us.
Help us, Lord.
Help us to forgive and to let go of anything that would pull us back towards grievance and grudge,
anything that would hold us in resentment or fear.
Lord, help us to be at peace with each other and with ourselves.

Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be Your name.
Your kingdom come,
Your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins,
as we forgive those who sin against us.
Lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.
God, give us the resilience to keep fighting for freedom,
yet the strength to remain non-violent.
Lord, have mercy.

Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be Your name.
Your kingdom come,
Your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins,
as we forgive those who sin against us.
Lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power,
and the glory are Yours
now and for ever.
Amen

PRAYERS BASED ON SCRIPTURE PASSAGES

A LITANY BASED ON PSALM 22

1. O God, O God, why have You forsaken us?
   Why are You so far from saving us, so far from the cries of anguish?
   O God, the cries ring out day by day, but You do not answer;
   night by night, there is no rest.

2. Yet You alone are holy; enthroned on the praise of all people.
   In You our ancestors put their trust; they trusted and You delivered them.
   To You they cried out and were saved;
   in You they trusted and were not put to shame.

3. Scorned by everyone, despised and mocked; insults hurled:
   'If they trust in the Lord, then let the Lord rescue them!'
   Yet You brought us out of the womb; placing us at our mother's breast.
   From birth cast upon You; from our birth You have been our God.
   Do not be far from us, for trouble is near and there is no one to help.

4. Raging bulls stampede and encircle us.
   Roaring lions that tear their prey open their mouths wide in threat.
   We are poured out like water; bones are out of joint;
   our hearts turned to wax and melted inside;
   mouths dried up like a broken clay pot, tongues stuck to the roof of our mouths;
   we are laid in the dust of death.

5. Enemies surround us, like a pack of wild dogs; piercing hands and feet.
   Our bones are on display; people stare and gloat.
   They divide our clothes among them and cast lots for our belongings.
   Do not be far from us, O God.
   You are our strength; come quickly to help us.
   Deliver our souls from the sword and our lives from the power of the dogs.
   Rescue us from the mouths of the lions; save us from the horns of the bulls.

6. All the ends of the earth will remember and turn to the Lord,
   and all the people of the world will bow down before Almighty God,
   for dominion belongs to the Lord and none but God rules over the nations.
   All the rich of the earth will feast and worship;
   all who go down to the dust will kneel before God, those who cannot keep themselves alive, for God has not despised or scorned the suffering of the afflicted one.

7. When Your people meet, You, O God, will fill our hearts with Your praises.
   Everyone will see our promises to You kept.
   The poor will eat and be full,
   and all who worship You will be thankful and live in hope.
   From the four corners of the earth people are coming to their senses,
   are running back to God.
   Long-lost families are falling on their faces before God;
   for God is the ruler of the nations.

8. All the power-mongers are before the Lord – worshipping!
   All the poor and powerless, too – worshipping!

9. Along with those who are dying and almost in the grave – worshipping!
   Future generations will be told about the Lord.
   They will proclaim God's righteousness, declaring to a people yet unborn:
   The Lord has saved us!

Leader: God our Maker,
may we know You near us, very present in times of trouble.
When fear, hatred and division
threaten individual safety and tear at the fabric of our society;
when angry mobs, protests and demonstrations
feel like roaring lions and wild dogs to those on the other side of the lines;
remind us, O God, that You are the ruler of the nations.

We pray, Almighty God, that
all the power-mongers would fall on their faces before You,
all the poor and powerless would know Your care,
along with those who are dying and almost in the grave;
be near them, God.

We proclaim Your righteousness, Lord;
we declare to all people, even those yet unborn:

All: You alone are holy; enthroned on the praise of all people.
In You, O God, our ancestors put their trust;
they trusted and You delivered them.
To You, O God, they cried out and were saved in You;
they trusted and were not put to shame.

Leader: Receive our worship this day:

All: Glory to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit.
As it was in the beginning, is now
and ever shall be, world without end.
Amen



A PRAYER BASED ON PSALM 51:10-15

Create in me a clean heart, O God,
and put a new and right spirit within me.
Do not cast me away from your presence,
and do not take your holy spirit from me.
Restore to me the joy of your salvation,
and sustain in me a willing spirit.

Then I will teach transgressors your ways,
and sinners will return to you.
Deliver me from bloodshed, O God,
O God of my salvation,
and my tongue will sing aloud of your deliverance.

O Lord, open my lips,
and my mouth will declare your praise.
(Psalm 51:10-15)

God, will You purify our hearts,
that they may be open to compassion and mercy for all people.
Where we once saw a stranger, let us recognise a child of God.
Where we once saw a threat, may we see someone who longs for grace.
Keep us from violence towards Your children, but direct our anger towards injustice.
Let our tongue declare Your glory and Your righteousness,
and may our actions build Your kingdom on earth as in heaven.
Amen

A PRAYER BASED ON EZEKIEL 36:36

Then the nations that are left all around you shall know that I, the LORD, have rebuilt the ruined places, and replanted that which was desolate; I, the LORD, have spoken, and I will do it.
(Ezekiel 36:36)

Lord, in Your mercy,
will You bring Your healing to the hurting places in our communities.
For people in pain and captivity, we seek Your comfort.
For people in poverty and struggling to survive, we seek Your blessing upon them and Your justice in bringing equity.
For all that is ruined, Lord, may it be remade in Your love and imbued with Your beauty and creativity.
For all that is desolate, may You breathe life into its dust.
Bring Your healing and Your fullness to the people and places that we know are broken;
and for those places known to You, Lord,
may Your Spirit move and Your will be done.
Amen

A PRAYER BASED ON LUKE 4:16-19

[Jesus] went to the synagogue on the sabbath day, as was his custom. He stood up to read, and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written:

'The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
because he has anointed me
to bring good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives
and recovery of sight to the blind,
to let the oppressed go free,
to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour.'
(Luke 4:16-19)

God of justice,
keep us from merely reading or offering words to You in our worship.
Fill us with Your Spirit afresh, that we may be good news,
good news to all who are affected by circumstances and systems beyond their control.
When we have been guilty or complicit in fostering injustice,
forgive us,
and give us the strength to reconcile and make peace.
Give us the fervour to pursue justice, that no one be oppressed.
Lord, help us all to see and to know Your favour and flourishing
in all the hurting places of this world.
Amen



BLESSINGS AND SENDING PRAYERS

SENDING PRAYER

Where there is division,
may You, O God, bind us together in unity.
Where there is hate,
may You, O God, help us to love.
Where there is no peace,
may You, O God, empower us to make peace.

And now, in the name of Jesus, the Prince of Peace:

We go now to our homes,
as makers of peace.
We go now to our communities,
as makers of peace.
We go now into the world,
as makers of peace.
Amen

SENDING PRAYER

Lord,
in Your mercy,
anoint us, that we may proclaim good news to all who suffer;
empower us, that we may we dismantle systems of oppression;
embolden us to set captives free, that we may all be opened to the truth
that You alone are God, and You alone are worthy to be praised.
Send us now in the power of Your Holy Spirit,
as we depend on the strong name of Jesus.
For Your glory, now and for ever,
Father, Son and Holy Spirit.
Amen

BLESSING

Called to live lives of holiness and justice,
called to care for all of creation,
called to build the kingdom of hope, love and peace in union with God,
Father, Son and Holy Spirit:
go now to live this into being in all you say and do, in the name of Jesus Christ.
Amen

THE GAELIC BLESSING/DEEP PEACE BLESSING

Deep peace of the running wave to you.
Deep peace of the flowing air to you.
Deep peace of the quiet earth to you.
Deep peace of the shining stars to you.
Deep peace of the gentle night to you.
Moon and stars pour their healing light on you.
Deep peace of Christ,
of Christ the light of the world to you.
Deep peace of Christ to you.

CREATIVE PRAYER IDEAS

These prayer activities can be used and adapted for personal reflection, group settings, participative activities within worship or as creative prayer stations.

- What are the things that disturb your peace?
- In which places and situations do you discern that peace is needed?
- How might you recognise peace/being at peace?
- How have you been known as a peacemaker?
- Where do you go to find peace? Where are the places to which you could lead others to find peace?
- What other prayers arise within you as you sit with the words of this poem?

PEACE BE UPON YOU

There are particular words and phrases that are common in our liturgies and our worship. This activity invites you to pause and wait with each of them, to be still and begin to notice what they evoke. Be curious about how that might help you pray more deeply and meaningfully. Create a word cloud from the words and phrases below and display it.

tranquillity
freedom
flourishing
peaceful
peace talks
be at peace
order
rest in peace
unity
wholeness
non-violence
disturb the peace
peace initiative
calm
no war
be still
harmony
fulness
everything as it should be
peace be with you
peace process
safety balance
sharing the peace

Invite participants to consider the words and to wait and discern what God is asking, as prayers become fully formed – developing from a movement in your spirit – to a stirring within your imagination – to a feeling in your heart – to words offered up – to action in response.

SEEKING PEACE

Jesus said to the disciples, 'Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you' (John 14:27). So it is already here and to be found! How might we uncover it and share it?

Take some time to go into your community in small groups and to notice where peace is already at work. Notice where peace has been made or is beginning to take root.

You may also notice where there is a need for peace to be made.

As you journey around your community, seek peace, find peace and make peace as you pray.

You may wish to gather people together and send them in groups. This might also provide the opportunity to regather and to talk about what has been noticed, so that prayers can be said and perhaps more prayers formed to be used in subsequent worship gatherings as intercessions for the community.

MAKE ME AN INSTRUMENT OF YOUR PEACE: A VIGIL FOR PEACE

As you shape a vigil, you may wish to use this short form or you may wish to think of music and songs that invite your congregation to consider, experience and seek peace together and hold a space that your community finds more recognisable and conducive to praying together.

Silence

OPENING PRAYER

Leader: God, Parent of all, who spoke order to chaos,

All: **guide us in our praying.**

Leader: Christ, Kin of all, the Prince of Peace,

All: **inspire in us the ways of love and peace.**

Leader: Spirit, Inspirer of all, who calms and counsels,

All: **bring Your peace to rest upon us.**

Leader: 'Peace be to you, and peace be to your house, and peace be to all that you have.' (1 Samuel 25:6)

Silence

READING: THE VOICE OF GOD IN A GREAT STORM

Ascribe to the LORD, O heavenly beings,
ascribe to the LORD glory and strength.
Ascribe to the LORD the glory of his name;
worship the LORD in holy splendour.
The voice of the LORD is over the waters;

the God of glory thunders,
the LORD, over mighty waters.
The voice of the LORD is powerful;
the voice of the LORD is full of majesty.

The voice of the LORD breaks the cedars;
the LORD breaks the cedars of Lebanon.
He makes Lebanon skip like a calf,
and Sirion like a young wild ox.

The voice of the LORD flashes forth flames of fire.
The voice of the LORD shakes the wilderness;
the LORD shakes the wilderness of Kadesh.

The voice of the LORD causes the oaks to whirl,
and strips the forest bare;
and in his temple all say, 'Glory!'

The LORD sits enthroned over the flood;
the LORD sits enthroned as king for ever.
May the LORD give strength to his people!
May the LORD bless his people with peace!
(Psalm 29)

SONG – PEACE, PERFECT PEACE

READING: THE RIGHTEOUS REIGN OF THE COMING KING

For a child has been born for us,
a son given to us;
authority rests upon his shoulders;
and he is named
Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.
His authority shall grow continually,
and there shall be endless peace
for the throne of David and his kingdom.
He will establish and uphold it
with justice and with righteousness
from this time onwards and for evermore.
The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this.
(Isaiah 9:6-7)

SONG – THE KINGDOM OF GOD IS JUSTICE AND PEACE

READING: JESUS CALMS THE STORM

On that day, when evening had come, he said to them, 'Let us go across to the other side.' And leaving the crowd behind, they took him with them in the boat, just as he was. Other boats were with him. A great gale arose, and the waves beat into the boat, so that the boat was already being swamped. But he was in the stern, asleep on the cushion; and they woke him up and said to him, 'Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?' He woke up and rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, 'Peace! Be still!' Then the wind ceased, and there was a dead calm. He said to them, 'Why are you afraid? Have you still no faith?' And they were filled with great awe and said to one another, 'Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?'
(Mark 4:35-41)

PRAYER

Leader: Prince of Peace, calm the storms within us. *Pause.*

Leader: Prince of Peace, calm the storms around us. *Pause.*

Leader: Prince of Peace, calm the storms in our communities. *Pause.*

Leader: Prince of Peace, calm the storms throughout our world. *Pause.*

All: Fill us with the assurance of Your presence.

Silence

SONG – CALM TO THE WAVES

READING: THE PEACE OF GOD WHICH SURPASSES ALL UNDERSTANDING

Rejoice in the Lord always; again, I will say, Rejoice. Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Finally, beloved, whatever is true, whatever is honourable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. Keep on doing the things that you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, and the God of peace will be with you.
(Philippians 4:4-9)

SONG – WHEN PEACE LIKE A RIVER

READING: THE MISSION OF THE SEVENTY

After this the Lord appointed seventy others and sent them on ahead of him in pairs to every town and place where he himself intended to go. He said to them, 'The harvest is plentiful, but the labourers are few; therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out labourers into his harvest. Go on your way. See, I am sending you out like lambs into the midst of wolves. Carry no purse, no bag, no sandals; and greet no one on the road. Whatever house you enter, first say, "Peace to this house!" And if anyone is there who shares in peace, your peace will rest on that person; but if not, it will return to you.'
(Luke 10:1-6)

PRAYER (ATTRIBUTED TO ST FRANCIS OF ASSISI)

Lord, make us instruments of Your peace:
where there is hatred, let us sow love;
where there is injury, let us sow pardon;
where there is doubt, let us sow faith;
where there is despair, let us sow hope;
where there is darkness, let us sow light;
where there is sadness, let us sow joy.

Silence

SONG – MAKE ME A CHANNEL OF YOUR PEACE

DISMISSAL

As Jesus sent the seventy into the world
to bring peace to homes and communities,
go now as peacemaker into this world.

The peace of God that surpasses all understanding be within you,
the peace of God that surpasses all understanding go before you,
the peace of God that surpasses all understanding be left in your wake,
and all for the glory of God.

Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit;
as it was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be, world without end.
Amen
End.

WHAT DOES PEACE LOOK LIKE? A CREATIVE PRAYER ACTIVITY

Often, we can describe peace by what it is not – the absence of war or violence – but what does peace look like? How might we imagine peace and picture peace, so that we can then work towards it? What happens when we name peace by what is present?

There are some well-known images that represent peace that we can use to begin imagining:

THE DOVE

Imagine what peace would look like from the dove's eye view – if you were looking down or flying over where you live, the region or the country that you are in. What does it mean to have that bigger perspective on peace? What else needs to be present in the making of peace? For example, unity, celebration of diversity, acceptance of difference?

THE OLIVE BRANCH

Consider how you might reach out and offer peace, or accept peace. What else can you do with branches, or olives? Shelter people from violence or threat? What can help feed and fuel peace?

Now you are invited to make/find your own image

As you begin, light a candle, asking God to enlighten your thinking and praying.

Take time to draw an image of something that represents the idea of peace to you. As you draw, let your prayers rise within you and offer them to God.

Alternatively, source an image [websites such as **Unsplash** offer royalty-free images], and as you wait with the image on your screen, let your prayers rise within you and offer them to God as you look at the image.

As you finish, blow out the candle; as you notice the smoke disperse into the air, ask God to help you to be a presence for peace in the spaces and places where you find yourself.

'DEEP PEACE' – THE GAELIC BLESSING: A CREATIVE PRAYER ACTIVITY

Deep peace of the running wave to you.

Deep peace of the flowing air to you.
Deep peace of the quiet earth to you.
Deep peace of the shining stars to you.
Deep peace of the gentle night to you.
Moon and stars pour their healing light on you.
Deep peace of Christ,
of Christ the light of the world to you.
Deep peace of Christ to you.

This blessing from the Gaelic tradition speaks of peace in beautiful ways.

Seeing our faith as rooted in our lived experience and embodied not only within ourselves but also within the rhythm of creation, praying this poem can open our imaginations to different ways we experience peace. The poem can also help us relate our prayers to places and spaces within our lives and the life of the world, places that need to experience reconciliation, healing, justice and ultimately peace.

You are invited to use this blessing to reflect personally and privately, as a prayer activity for a group or to create a prayer station as part of a set of creative prayer activities.

As you read the blessing again, wait with God and let your imagination wander to the different places where peace might be found, or where peace needs to be made.

Running wave – this can be seen as justice that rolls like rushing water, just as the prophets declare in Scripture.

Flowing air – this might lead us to think of climate justice, and the racial justice issues that are often a root cause.

Quiet earth – perhaps this phrase can help us imagine a world that is truly at peace, where God's invitation to 'be still' (Psalm 46:10) has come to pass.

Shining stars – the stars were the main tool for navigation in days gone by. What is it that guides us towards peace and justice? How might we navigate this uneasy road to peace?

Gentle night – Barbara Brown Taylor writes about the gifts we can find in the dark and reminds us that we do not need to be afraid of the dark. The dark is also the place where the growing and greening is done, a place of waiting and a place of rest. Where do you need to find rest among the work for racial justice and in making peace? What gifts are to be found in the midst of the current challenges?

We are encouraged in the Psalms to keep watch through the night. Where do we need to remain vigilant on issues of racial justice that we have perhaps fallen asleep over?

Healing light – As we work to make peace, there needs to be reconciliation, restoration and healing. Where do you need to be healed? Where do you recognise opportunities for reconciliation and restoration in which you can play an active part? How might you experience restorative justice as healing?

Peace of Christ – this is the aim! Christ the Prince of Peace is the example. Bring all of what you have imagined before Him now.

SPEAK OUT FOR THOSE WHO CANNOT SPEAK, FOR THE RIGHTS OF ALL THE DESTITUTE. SPEAK OUT, JUDGE RIGHTEOUSLY, DEFEND THE RIGHTS OF THE POOR AND NEEDY.

Proverbs 31:8-9

SECTION TWO

BIBLE READINGS, HYMNS, PRAYERS AND POEMS

DENZIL JOHN





SCRIPTURE VERSES THAT CAN BE USED

Hosea 12:6
But as for you, return to your God,
hold fast to love and justice,
and wait continually for your God.

Romans 12:21
Do not be overcome by evil, but
overcome evil with good.

Proverbs 22:2
The rich and the poor have this in
common: The LORD is the maker of
them all.

Acts 10:34-35
Then Peter began to speak to them:
'I truly understand that God shows no
partiality, but in every nation anyone
who fears him and does what is right is
acceptable to him.'

Colossians 3:9-11
Do not lie to one another, seeing that
you have stripped off the old self
with its practices and have clothed
yourselves with the new self, which is
being renewed in knowledge according
to the image of its creator. In that
renewal there is no longer Greek and
Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised,
barbarian, Scythian, slave and free; but
Christ is all and in all!

Proverbs 31:8-9
Speak out for those who cannot speak,
for the rights of all the destitute.
Speak out, judge righteously,
defend the rights of the poor and
needy.

Micah 6:8
And what does the LORD require of
you but to do justice, and to love
kindness, and to walk humbly with your
God?

Amos 5:24
But let justice roll down like waters,
and righteousness like an ever-flowing
stream.

Isaiah 1:17
Learn to do good;
seek justice,
rescue the oppressed,
defend the orphan,
plead for the widow.

Psalm 82:3
Give justice to the weak and the
orphan; maintain the right of the lowly
and the destitute.

HYMNS AND WORSHIP SONGS

- All Are Welcome
- Be Thou My Vision
- Beauty for Brokenness
- Bring Forth the Kingdom
- Brother, Sister, Let Me Serve You
- Christ, Be Our Light
- Come Now O Prince of Peace
- Cry Freedom! In the Name of God, and Let the Cry Resound
- Extol the God of Justice
- From Those Forever Shackled
- God Forgave My Sin
- God Is Working His Purpose Out
- God of Freedom, God of Justice
- God, Your Justice Towers
- God's Spirit Is in My Heart
- Great God and Lord of the Earth
- How Good It Is, What Pleasure Comes
- How Shall We Sing Salvation's Song
- I Got a Crown Up in the Kingdom
- Jesus Christ Is Waiting, Waiting in the Streets
- Jesus Heard with Deep Compassion
- Let Us Build a House Where Love Can Dwell
- Lord, for the Years Your Love Has Kept and Guided
- Lord of All Hopefulness
- My Love for You
- My Song Is Love Unknown
- One Bread, One Body
- Our God Reigns
- The Church Is Like a Table
- The Church's One Foundation
- The Justice Song
- They Will Know We Are Christians by Our Love
- This Is Amazing Grace
- This We Can Do for Justice and Peace
- True Religion
- We Are One in the Spirit
- When Israel was in Egypt's Land
- With the Lord, There Is Mercy and Fulness of Redemption



PRAYERS AND POEMS

PRAYER

God of all goodness and mercy,
we honour Your name and seek Your light
upon our lives, and the lives of all people in this world.

We often share before You our concerns
for the poor and frail in society,
for the weak and sick,
for the voiceless and the powerless
and for all who are unable to transform their circumstances.

Yet, Father God, we as individuals and churches,
as denominations and councils of churches,
could achieve much by reaching out
with words of support for the voiceless,
with actions of compassion with the lonely,
and by speaking up when the rest of the world
has passed our communities by.

Lord of compassion and mercy,
help us to be actively kind and supportive
to our neighbours and our community,
to visit lonely people in our society,
to do justice in an unjust world.

Lord of peace and reconciliation,
forgive us for complaining about sectarianism
and not seeking to be bridge-builders,
for nodding with those who are divisive in their comments
and for not offering positive thoughts for harmony in society.

Lord of grace and understanding,
help us to be gracious and considerate
in our corner of Your kingdom,
to listen to all points of view
and to map out the road
of a peaceful community.

Hear us, Lord, in the name of the Prince of Peace.
Amen

POEM

And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in the one body. And be thankful.
(Colossians 3:15)

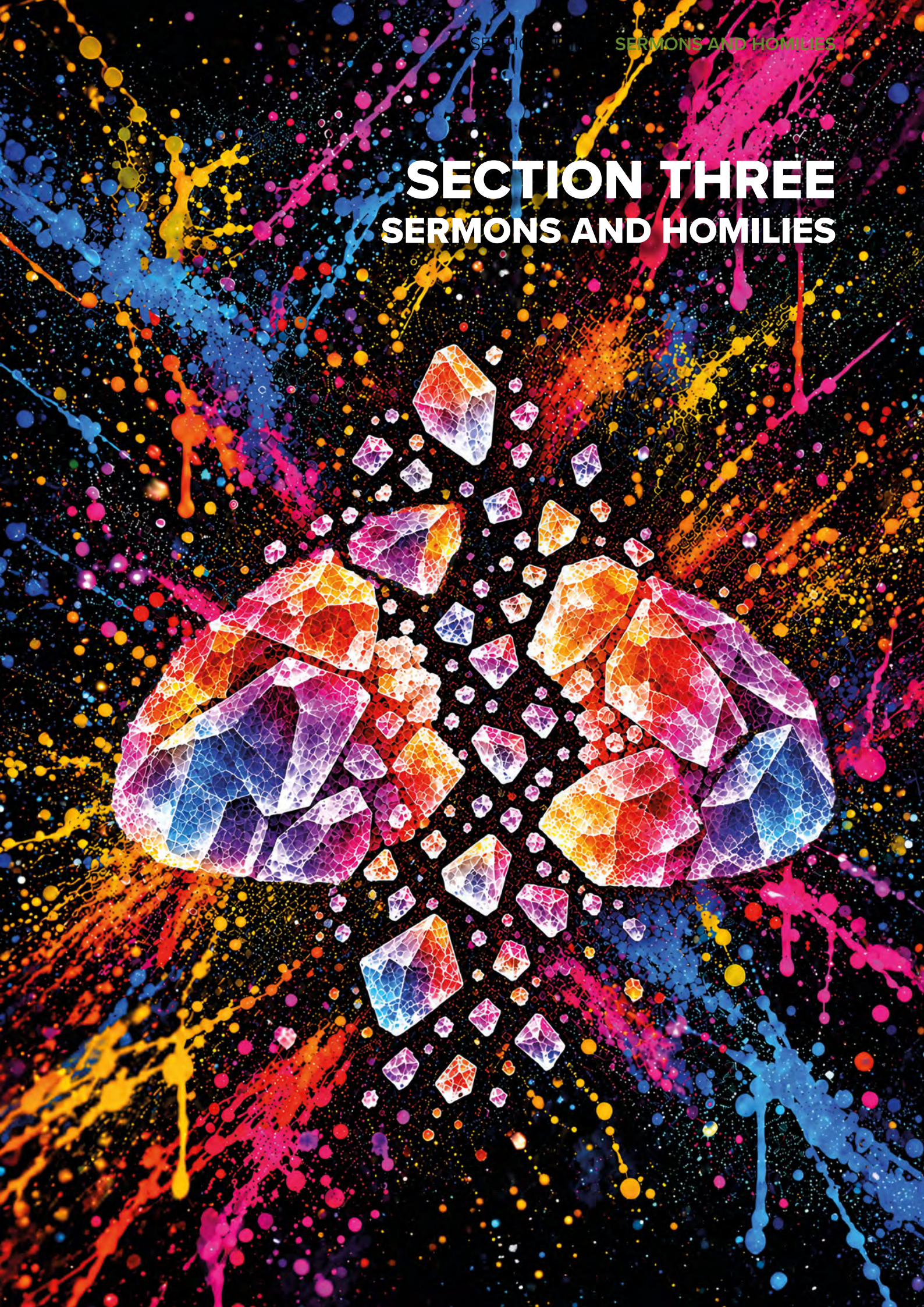
Through Scripture's telescopic eye, I see the dove
that Noah's grasp released in search of land,
where new beginnings for mankind might offer hope,
and grace might govern life, each hand in hand.
Yet history records the clenched and threatening fists
of brothers parting ways, when selfishness and greed
demanded unfair shares of human wealth and fame,
and left the frail without the smallest loaf to feed.
I saw the dove upon the shoulder of a man
in whom the Lord was pleased and blessed Him so,
and He was King of Glory and the Prince of Peace,
the Saviour of lost sinners, friend and foe.
He rules my heart and bids me board His Ark of peace,
to live in Him, and He would live in me,
and be a bridge of reconciling love at work,
with open arms, for all the world to see.
Christ of the cross and risen from the darkest grave,
I thank You for the light of hope and love,
that calls each human being of the human race
to be for all a grace- and peace-filled dove.



LET ME BRING A LITTLE BREAD, THAT YOU MAY REFRESH YOURSELVES, AND AFTER THAT YOU MAY PASS ON – SINCE YOU HAVE COME TO YOUR SERVANT.

Genesis 18:5

SECTION THREE
SERMONS AND HOMILIES





1. A MEDITATION ON PSALM 74
REVD LORRAINE C. SHORTEN

Many of the psalms follow a similar pattern, where the psalmist engages with God at different levels within the song. Psalm 74 is clearly a psalm of lament. Some commentators offer an early date of composition, such as around the time of the fall of Jerusalem in 586 BC; others a much later one, identifying it with the manner that Antiochus Epiphanes in 168 BC invaded Jerusalem and destroyed much of the Temple and its religious decorations. In verses 1-11 of the lament, the psalmist asks why the LORD has abandoned His people, allowed the destruction of the buildings that represented God and left the people in desolation. He states that God has held back and left the people without hope. Such injustice to the people and a challenge to God Himself.

In our time, there is anger at every junction of human experience. The injustices that are suffered, where people, whatever their creed, may ask why their God has forsaken them. These may be local events, vandalism, gang warfare, economic despair or housing unfairness. Others will ask searching social and theological questions about natural catastrophes or different environmental issues, such as the disasters relating to the Lende Kholā and Trishulī Kholā rivers of Nepal and Tibet. Do people seek spiritual support at times of crisis, or do they walk away from faith communities?

The second section of the psalm, verses 12-17, remembers the nature of God and His history, asserting that He is the 'King … from of old'. The psalmist remembers that God destroyed the devil in the form of sea monsters and the multi-headed Leviathan. It was this creator God that i revealed Himself in the Hebrew world and showed mercy and support to His people. Is it not the task of God's people today to point out the very nature and history of God, the ever-present, all-embracing, suffering God who offers hope in despair, life in the shadow of death, forgiveness to the transgressor and harmony in society?

Then in the third section, verses 18-23, there is a realisation that God's people need to engage and trust in the power and purpose of God. In verse 19, the psalmist asks God not to allow his (the writer's) 'soul' to fall to the 'wild animals', while referring to himself as the 'dove' that confesses the name of God. The psalmist identifies himself with that soul, or, in New Testament language, what I call the "dove-people", those who are filled with the Holy Spirit. The pleas on behalf of the oppressed, the poor and the downtrodden remain the prayers of God's people today.

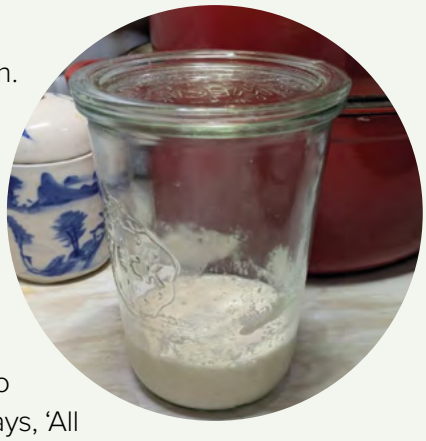


Whatever the horrors of our time, or the suffering of people at large, God is a proactive influence and defender of justice. Surely justice and peace must remain on the church agenda in the face of the crosswinds of life. Did not Jesus see human need in poverty, hunger, fear and grief and reach out in proactive love and grace? The psalmist called on God to rise up, to lead the fight against the wrongs of society. Jesus invites His people to love their enemies, to be forgiving and merciful, to share resources with the needy and to accept those of different faiths and cultures. The Jesus-people on every continent and in every community need to challenge injustice and be peacemakers in our time and in our areas. The God-spirit, or the dove of peace, in each and every one of us needs to engage at every opportunity, 'for they will be called children of God' (Matthew 5:9).

2. BREAD AND PEACE: A REFLECTION
REVD LORRAINE C. SHORTEN

This Racial Justice Sunday we are focusing on how we can be peacemakers, peace-tellers and peace-bringers. The words *shalom* and *salaam*, from other cultures, are both translated as 'peace', but they mean something deeper than simply the absence of war or conflict. They speak of wholeness, well-being, harmony and right relationships. People everywhere want and strive for peace, but the conflicts around the world are too big for us to even start to think how there can be peaceful resolutions. So where do we start?

I believe we have to start small. Jesus told a parable: 'The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed in with three measures of flour until all of it was leavened' (Matthew 13:33). A little piece of yeast, spread throughout the whole dough, made the bread light and fluffy. Now, I like bread, but I am no Paul Hollywood when it comes to making it. I have made lots of loaves that have not risen, have come out stodgy, have a hard crust or have been too soft on the inside. The loaves taste okay but are not really sandwich material. I usually rely on the local supermarket or a breadmaker to ensure that my loaf is useable. But I persevere. My latest challenge is sourdough bread. If you remember, this was very popular during the 2020 lockdown. Lots of people shared their sourdough starters – and their failures.



This picture is of my first attempt with sourdough. This is three days old; I am so proud!

I am inspired to try again with bread after reading a book called *Bake and Pray: Liturgies and Recipes for Baking Bread as a Spiritual Practice* by Kendall Vanderslice, founder of the Edible Theology Project.[v] In the book, she compares the different actions of breadmaking to the rhythm of church and faith life. Vanderslice says, 'All throughout Scripture, bread serves as a sign of God's blessing. It marks God's presence and provision, as well as God's promise to us.'[vi]

Bread appears throughout the Bible as a way of bringing people together.

In Genesis 18, Abraham welcomes three unexpected visitors and asks Sarah to make some bread for them. It is a simple act of hospitality, offering food, welcome and peace.

In the ancient biblical world, sharing bread with someone meant much more than simply having a meal together. It was a sign of friendship and trust. Once you had eaten someone's bread, there was an understanding that you could not then turn against them or raise your hand against them.

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v https://kendallvanderslice.com/ (accessed 14 October 2026).

vi Kendall Vanderslice, *Bake and Pray: Liturgies and Recipes for Baking Bread as a Spiritual Practice* (Tyndale House, 2024).

We see this in 1 Samuel 25, where bread becomes a powerful tool for peace. Abigail knows that David is angry and heading towards her household. She doesn't simply send an apology with a servant; she goes out to meet him herself, bringing with her an extraordinary gift of food, including 200 loaves of bread. We can see that the bread stands between David's anger and Abigail's household. What looks as though it could end in violence and bloodshed is turned into a conversation and, ultimately, peace. Bread becomes much more than food; it becomes a peacemaker.

Throughout His ministry Jesus shared food and bread with all kinds of people: sinners, tax collectors and outsiders. He miraculously fed 5,000 people with five loaves and two fishes. Jesus often brought people together with food. He wasn't afraid to cross boundaries or share a meal with people from very different backgrounds.

A very well-known meal in the Bible is the Last Supper that Jesus shared with His disciples. On the night before He died, Jesus took a piece of bread, gave thanks, broke it and shared it with His friends. Jesus gave all His disciples a piece of bread from the same loaf. In doing so, He showed that His love and welcome extended even to those who would let Him down (see Luke 22:19-21). This simple loaf became a peace treaty. It was such a simple action, and yet it has meant so much to Christians ever since. When we share bread in Holy Communion, we remember Jesus and all that He gave for us. But we also remember that we belong to one another. We may come from different families, cultures and backgrounds, with very different experiences of life, but we still gather around the same table and receive the same bread and share the peace with each other that Jesus offered to all who love Him.

Bread is found in almost every culture. It may take different forms – homemade sourdough, thick sliced white bread, tiger bread, flatbread, hard dough, chapatis, pitta, naan or countless other varieties – but the basic human experience is familiar: bread is made to be shared. Perhaps that is why it is such a powerful symbol of peace.

Peace. *Shalom*. *Salaam*.

Different words, different languages, but a shared longing. A longing for a world where everyone has enough. Where no one is treated as an outsider. Where people can sit together without fear. Where justice and peace meet.

On this Racial Justice Sunday, perhaps we might ask ourselves, whose bread have we never tasted? Whose story have we never heard? Who is not yet at our table?

And perhaps, in the simple act of sharing bread, we may discover that the road to peace doesn't begin with grand gestures, but it can start small, with an open door, a loaf of bread and a willingness to say, 'Come. Sit with me. Let us break bread together.'



3. PEACE: WHAT IT MEANS TO GOD AND WHAT IT SHOULD MEAN TO US!

REVD MANDY RALPH

> I have said these things to you while I am still with you. But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you. Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid. (John 14:25-27)

Peace. As you consider this passage of Scripture just where you find yourself in these moments, what does peace look like and mean to you? Is peace perhaps not really something you think about unless prompted? Is peace more about those five minutes of peace and quiet at the end of a hectic day? Is peace something you associate with spirituality? Or is peace something that you hear about on the news or read about on social media, negotiated by leaders and politicians in a time of conflict?
Peace is a state of calm, of being chilled in body, mind and soul. Yet peace can mean different things to different people, depending on their situation, environment and the context in which they find themselves. When I reflect on the above passage and think about peace from a minister's perspective, I think of the words in verse 27 in relation to funeral services. The passage and words are used as a way of reassuring those who are grieving, reminding them of God's love, compassion and comfort for them.

God's peace is beyond anything we can offer, a deep and all-encompassing peace that wraps around us and makes us feel safe. To those who are grieving and heartbroken, I always pray for a sense of God reaching out with a feeling of, 'I've got you and I feel your hurt; you are not alone. Let Me sit alongside you in your grief.'

'Keeping the peace,' a term we are all probably familiar with, can extend from a parent trying to navigate a sibling falling-out to a careful negotiation that takes place for a family event about who does or doesn't get invited. For those of us in church leadership, it can be about negotiating a peaceful outcome during a contentious debate at a Kirk Session or a church meeting. For 'keeping the peace' is not just about harmonious agreement; it is also about being fair and just to all parties involved.

'Keeping the peace' encourages us to avoid unnecessary arguments and conflict in our day-to-day lives. To be able to keep the peace, we have to listen to each other, to be respectful of each other, even when our opinions differ, and to be gracious to each other. Now as Christians you might think, 'Keeping the peace – that's easily done!' But is it?

Jesus understood human nature and all its failings, for He walked among us. He understood that worldly peace is about consensus, sometimes negotiation and compromise, and can be done in a way that excludes people – at times even the people the peace process is trying to help – in order to get it across the finish line.

Jesus asks us to love our neighbours, those we know and those we don't. In loving our neighbours, surely that also means living in peace with our neighbours. What does that look like for you? Is it not falling out with your neighbour when they park over your driveway, or when they don't put the bins out, or when they are playing their guitar or their music loudly late at night?

Or is it deeper than that? Is it about accepting diversity and different cultures and embracing people, rather than gossiping or fear-mongering or being prejudiced towards those we deem different from ourselves.

If we go back to the words of Scripture above, Jesus also says, 'Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid.' One of the elements that stands in the way of peace is fear. When people are afraid, they are on high alert, their heart rate increases, they can get agitated and so physically their body is not at peace or in a calm a state. We then get into a mindset of protecting ourselves at all costs. In doing so we sometimes cause more harm than good and end up hurting others because we can't think bigger than ourselves. It can be hard to be fair in our thinking and actions when we are afraid. Jesus seems to understand fear and its effect on having peace, even peace of mind.

Jesus teaches us that when we walk in His ways, we do so as a community in faith. As hard as it might be, sometimes we need to pause, pray and tap into the peace that the Holy Spirit offers us. It has been shown that if you can keep calm in your approach when someone is getting annoyed, it often helps diffuse the situation. Not easy to do in the heat of the moment, though.

But if we are willing to educate ourselves in the injustice others have experienced, to walk a mile in another's shoes, maybe we would be more understanding of the hurt caused and felt, and perhaps we would be more willing to be advocates and allies.

Next time you are invited in church or in your faith gathering to share the peace with those around you, think about this verse in relation to what you are doing. As you share the peace, let the Holy Spirit surround you, for we don't say, 'Let the peace of the world be with you.' Rather, we say, 'Let the peace of Christ be with you.' It is peace that totally encompasses us all. It is peace that is for everyone and all people. It is peace that no one can take from you because you have an advocate for your peace in the Holy Spirit.

As we reflect on racial justice this year, and what that means for us as Christians, why not think about who you can go and share the peace with that would make a positive impact on their lives and on your community. Let's consider how we can truly live a peaceable life, loving our neighbours, embracing diversity and being advocates for justice and peace in our homes, in our places of worship and in our communities.

'Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you.'

Amen





4. JUSTICE AND PEACE IN A BELOVED COMMUNITY
DR RICHARD REDDIE

As a young man growing up, my Jamaican parents had a particular reverence for Revd Dr Martin Luther King Jr. My siblings and I were encouraged to 'be like Dr King', who was articulate, educated and, most of all 'a man of God'. There were worse people that they could have suggested that we emulate, so I took a personal interest in Dr King, particularly his civil rights activism, which involved a commitment to non-violence. What particularly engaged me, and also perplexed me, was his unwavering belief that people's hearts could be changed from hate to love. At one point, he was called the 'King of Love', and described as someone committed to saving America's soul.

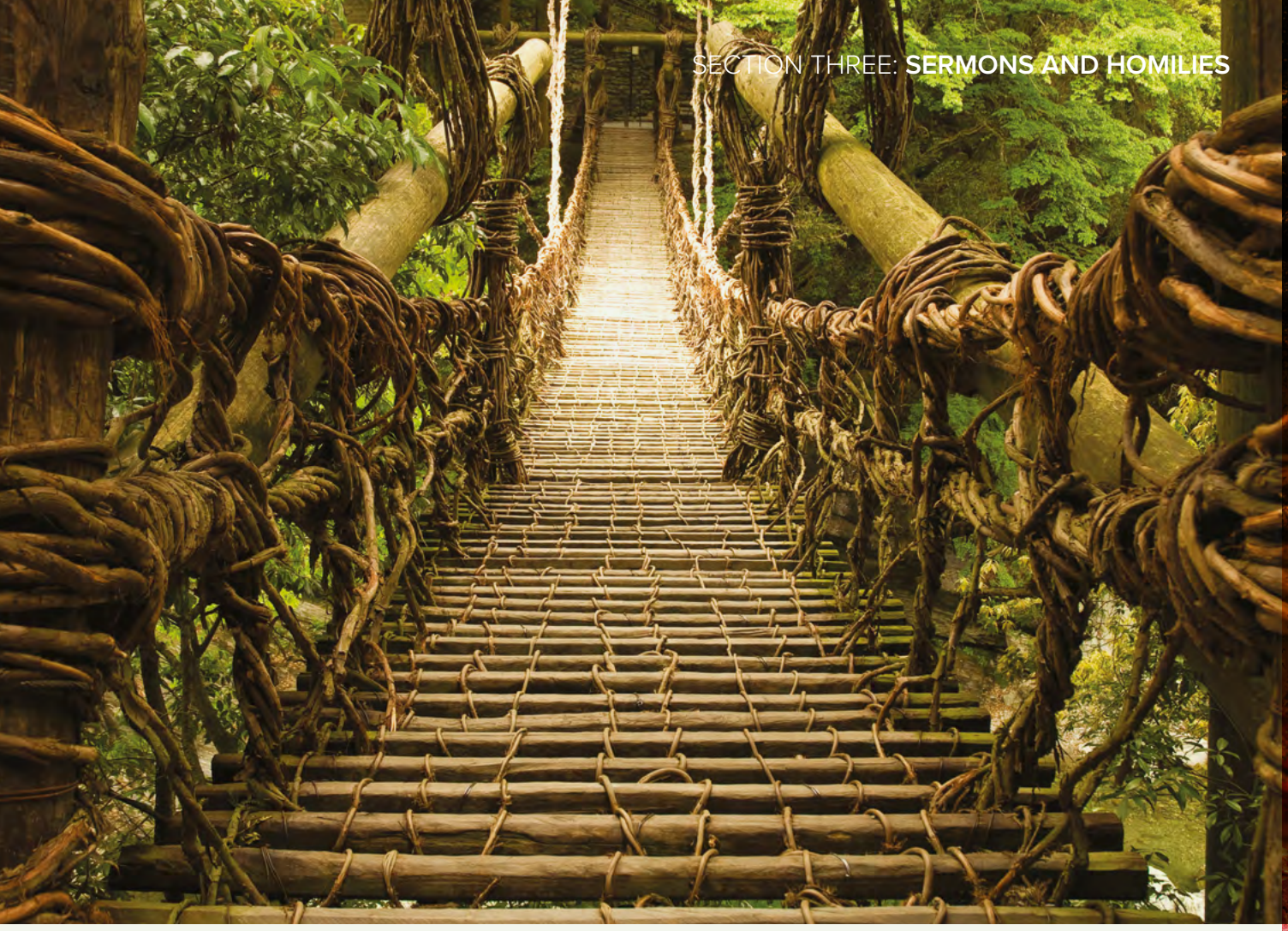
Dr King, as we know, was a Baptist preacher who believed in a God of love, justice and peace. In his mind, the America in which he lived was exhibiting a lack of love and justice for his fellow African Americans and those on the margins of society, and a dearth of peace in terms of the wars it was pursuing overseas.

Dr King lived and died during a time of great racial upheaval in the USA. While what is taking place now on UK shores cannot be directly compared to the events in the USA, we are nevertheless currently passing through a very worrying time in which race, identity and belonging are being discussed like never before. In all truth, this is a debate in which there has been far too much heat and not enough light, but it is one that Christians must engage in for a number of theological and socio-political reasons.

One of the great aspects about the US civil rights movement, which was a justice-driven campaign, was the fact that it was largely led by the church. Christians believed that their God of justice was calling them to address a situation that was unjust and corrupt. I would argue that the targeting of minority groups such as refugees, asylum seekers, Muslims, migrants etc., by so-called patriots, is unjust. Equally, the co-opting of Christian symbols and even the participation of Christians in such hate-inspired protests, which have the tendency to become violent, is undoubtedly warped. As such, those who are on the side of love, peace and justice have a God-given duty to engage in this situation. In many respects this is very much a battle for the soul of our nation, and it is one that we cannot afford to lose.

Moreover, from a scriptural point of view, I would argue that there is something very sinister taking place with regard to what some are calling 'Christian nationalism'. Christianity is first and foremost posited on love: love for God and love for one another. Its other characteristics are peace, justice, mercy and compassion. Christians who are participating in far-right protests are, in my opinion, partaking in activities that are diametrically opposed to those characteristics.

It is often said that the gospel is biased towards the poor. Certainly, in Jesus' 'Blessed' statements from His Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5:1-12), as well as His reading from Isaiah in the Nazareth synagogue (Luke 4:16-19), those whom He singled out for special attention were the lowly, meek, sick and helpless.



These are the very people in need of our prayers and assistance, as opposed to our opprobrium and rancour. In terms of those who take an opposing view of this narrative, it does lead me to ask a very important question: which Bible are they reading?

However, there is even a more profound issue at play here, which is the positing of Christianity as part of a 'White British/Irish' identity, as opposed to Islam which is 'Brown/Black and foreign'. This is undoubtedly a misrepresentation of Christianity that seeks to present the faith as one that encourages division and enmity, and is even willing to justify the use of violence to achieve its divine aims.

In Ephesians 6:12, we read that 'our struggle is not against enemies of blood and flesh', but against 'authorities' and 'powers' in our dark world. Given that some are using Christian scriptures and symbols to advance their nationalistic and patriotic claims, I would argue that this is now a spiritual battle.

One contemporary interpretation of those dark powers is the dark web, an influential platform on which so much nefarious activity takes place. Similarly, other activities in cyberspace also utilise platforms that enable extremists not only to promulgate their messages of hate, but also to organise strategically to hold protests and demonstrations. Equally, we know that some of these groups are the beneficiaries of resources, including money, from shadow organisations and entities that appear hell bent on spreading hate, causing division and fomenting hostility between communities.



I believe that our response to this proverbial fight can also be found in Ephesians 6, particularly verses 13-18. As Christians we need to' put on the whole armour of God' (verse 11) to respond to this assault. This 'armour' includes the 'belt of truth' that we use to confront all the deceptions and mistruths spread about asylum seekers, migrants and religious minorities. As we know, the internet is awash with stories that misrepresent the current conversation around British and Irish identity and immigration.

We also need to put on the 'breastplate of righteousness'. Bible scholars tell us that the ancient Hebrew and Greek words for 'righteousness' and 'justice' are very similar; and unlike other Romance languages, English tends to use the word 'righteousness' instead of 'justice' in the New Testament. Consequently, the term 'justice' could be applied to explain the nature of the work in which we are engaged. This is very much about a fight for justice.

Additionally, we need to have 'our feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace' (NIV), which demonstrates that the gospel is a message of peace. Jesus, our Lord and Saviour, is the Prince of Peace. He may have died a brutal death on the cross, but there is nothing violent about the good news.

The 'shield of faith', 'helmet of salvation' and 'sword of the Spirit' are what we use to present the good news in all its glory and clarity – this is a message of hope for all humanity, which tells us that we are all made in the image of God (Genesis 1:27) and loved by Him (John 3:16). Although the Christian cross can look a bit like an unsharpened sword, it is a symbol of unity – God to humanity and humanity to humanity.

I believe that the results of such an engagement would lead to what Dr King described as a Beloved Community, a society in which people from all racial, national, religious and ethnic backgrounds are respected, and where their human dignity is affirmed. It would be one where people are unafraid to disagree – particularly in the face of injustice – but where we can be reconciled, where we can evolve and where we can come together in ways that are non-violent and not divisive. The cornerstones of such a society would be peace (non-violence), justice, love, dignity, truth and equality.

In the Lord's Prayer, which Jesus taught His disciples, He says, 'Your kingdom come. Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven' (Matthew 6:10). One can assume that the Kingdom of heaven, indeed heaven itself, is a place of peace, justice, love and a whole range of positive traits. This is the Kingdom we are praying to abide in our world. It is one we must both pray for and act for.

5. KEEPING THE PEACE: THE SHALOM OF GOD AND THE MINISTRY OF RECONCILIATION

JUSTIN LAU

'Keeping the peace.' When I hear that phrase, I immediately think, 'Don't rock the boat. Don't be a nuisance or a bother. No need for tension or conflict. Just keep the status quo. Everything's fine just as it is.'

I know exactly what it means to keep the peace, and I'm very good at it. I grew up in Japan where the cardinal sin was to be an inconvenience to those around you. Societal harmony mattered above all else. In the noughties, the acronym 'KY' (*kūki yomenai*) went viral across the Japanese nation, used to mock anyone 'unable to read the air'. There's a similar line of thinking here in the UK, where people expect social awareness. Eye roll at the person who cuts the queue or blares music on the train.

Now, as an East Asian, I value collectivism, a consideration for others even when it means at times sacrificing your own comfort. But what I don't agree with is fitting in to the point of utterly losing yourself. Yet the difficulty of being a minority in a majority culture is the demand for complete assimilation. Anyone who doesn't adhere is viewed as an outlier – or worse, an interloper. People complain of disruption to their norms and ways of life by those considered 'foreign' or 'other'.

But in God's Kingdom, there is a place for all – including these so-called 'others' – regardless of culture or skin colour. We know that God's Kingdom people will comprise every tribe, tongue and nation (Revelation 7:9). Multicultural; multiracial. So how do we reach that Kingdom ideal, or, at the very least, take one step closer in the right(eous) direction? How do we transcend racial and cultural divisions that are diametrically opposed to God's good and perfect will?

So far, my usage of 'peace' has been superficial, where a lack of peace equates to inconvenience. But I want to think about heavenly peace, not worldly peace: the *shalom* of God that Jesus promises to give that the world cannot give (John 14.27). Any purely human effort at peace will fail, because we aren't perfect. Only the perfect peace of a perfect God can ever bring perfect equilibrium to a world bereft of peace. God's peace is perfection, holy and righteous, stable and just.

And so we must begin with the good news: Jesus' proclamation and embodiment of peace, which breaks down hostility between us (Ephesians 2:11-22). This is the biblical truth of the united body of Christ: Jews and Gentiles, once estranged and irreconcilable, now brought together as one new humanity. The gospel of Jesus Christ is the gospel of peace: first peace between God and us, then peace within the human race.

But until God's *shalom* is fully established on earth, we have work to do in partnering with God's Kingdom vision. We now have a blueprint to follow – 'the ministry of reconciliation' (2 Corinthians 5:18-20) – in our ambassadorial pursuit of godly peace.





God did not reconcile God to humanity only for humanity to condemn one another. No, God reconciled God to humanity for the purposes of humanity to also be reconciled to one another. But where do we begin?

Jesus began His ministry by calling people to repent. That is where we must begin if we are to be godly peacemakers. We must acknowledge our brokenness and repent of our failings to view each other in the image of God; we must repent of our racial and cultural biases and our tendency to 'other' those who make us feel uncomfortable. Chinese American writer, Kristin T. Lee, says:

> Solidarity cannot come before repentance, forgiveness, and knowing ourselves rightly before God … When we don't search our own hearts and undergo lament, confession, and healing, biases grow, rifts deepen, and resentment festers. We perpetuate violence, we respond with vengeance, we harm others, and we *other* those who are unlike us, emphasizing their differences and foreignness.[vii]

But once we repent and receive the Lord's forgiveness, then we can seek solidarity with one another. Lee lists different ways people have described this solidarity or 'interconnectedness of humanity': the 'Beloved Community' (Revd Dr Martin Luther King Jr); 'the web of life' (Chief Seattle); 'Harmony Way' (Indigenous scholar and activist, Randy Woodley); Ubuntu, meaning 'I am because we are' (Bantu people of sub-Saharan Africa). All of these concepts connect to *shalom*, 'a term connoting deep wellness, peace, harmony, and grace toward our fellow human beings'.[viii]

Peace and justice go hand in hand. A perpetual danger for any majority culture is to marginalise minority cultures or peoples. This is unjust; this is anti-*shalom*. The 'manifold [multicoloured] 'wisdom of God' (Ephesians 3:10, NIV) is made manifest in the faces of each and every human being you come into contact with, regardless of how different they might be to you. There is no foreigner in Christ; we are no longer strangers or aliens.

It is unjust to deny a person's humanity and dignity; each person is made in the image of God. Therefore, it is just to restore unto each individual their very humanity and dignity – and that often only occurs through relationship. When you know somebody intimately, it makes it difficult to dehumanise or demonise them.

Take, for example, the occasion when I was with a neighbour who was complaining about immigrants, but when I mentioned my own struggles to stay in the country they brushed it aside and said, 'Oh, you'll be fine, you're different.' Or the time when I was chatting with a neighbour who said, 'We need more people like you who are contributing, not those who come over illegally and don't bother learning English.'

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vii Kristin T. Lee, *We Mend with Gold: An Immigrant Daughter's Reckoning with American Christianity* (Broadleaf Books, 2026), pp. 143, 157.

viii Lee, p. 163.



Two things struck me about those interactions. One, they projected their frustrations and fears on to others out of prejudice. They unhelpfully reinforced the 'good immigrant' narrative, where one's value is measured by one's ability to achieve and contribute – social capital – rather than in innately being an image bearer of God. Yet, two, they automatically expressed solidarity with me personally. I was 'exempt' because they knew me as a fully dimensional human being just like them. These discomfiting conversations proved insightful: relational connection and rapport ultimately overrode scapegoating and hatred of the other.

True peacemaking begins with the one. We are finite beings who cannot comprehend big numbers – hundreds, thousands, even a million – which become just a statistic on a page or screen. But when you build bridges with your neighbour, your colleague, your classmate, your family member, you discover a human being just like you, who breathes, eats, talks, sleeps, feels, loves and believes. Let's be intentional and press into our interconnectedness. After all, there isn't a single one of us who wouldn't want our whole humanity to be rightfully considered and respected by others.

We won't achieve world peace overnight. But we can start where we are and move in the right direction. If peace is a fundamental characteristic of God's coming Kingdom, then we should already be ushering peace on earth as it is in heaven. As we seek peace, let us seek justice; as we seek justice, let us seek peace. And the *shalom* of God that surpasses all understanding will guard our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus (see Philippians 4:7).

MY COMMAND IS THIS:
LOVE EACH OTHER AS
I HAVE LOVED YOU.

John 15:12



SECTION FOUR
REFLECTIONS

1. PEACE IS THE CHILD OF JUSTICE
DENZIL JOHN

The world has recorded the confrontations between peoples from time immemorial. In the earliest biblical narratives, those between Cain and Abel, Esau and Jacob, Joseph and his brothers, confrontation was allowed to ferment, and injustice to fester division. There were basic power struggles. History records how the strong dominated the weak, and the desire for power and wealth peppers early Israeli history. Old Testament writers note that others sought to take advantage of the weakness between Rehoboam and his former colleague, Jeroboam, and the evil of greed and avarice appear like the tempter in the early narratives of Genesis. The religious and sociological understanding of the basic nature of humanity illustrated the nature of 'human beings', and nothing has changed to this very day.

The current events played out in Ukraine and the Middle East, especially in Gaza, enact the same tragedy as the global wars of the last century. The confrontations within many countries on the African continent in particular illustrate the way civil wars play out the inability of humankind to live together and to solve disputes with respect and justice.

The phenomena of confrontation and domination are played out in the economic and industrial theatres of our time, and the pendulum of power swings from the left to the right and back again. Whatever our political bias may be, there is no room in such scenarios for objectivity and justice. It is often said that truth is the first casualty of war, and we currently face an age when AI, a wonderful and capable instrument for good, could become a cyber tool that will mislead and maim the innocent and the unaware.

Social unrest is used by political influencers to create confrontation in the quietest of suburbs; given a spark of hatred and mistrust, an inferno can develop, like the forest and heathland fires of 2026. Most of us are pacifists until someone tickles the venom of hatred. In turn, the aggression is focused on the 'other', whoever they may be, and the flame of confrontation can lead to riot. Whatever our thoughts may be concerning the global stage, we are unlikely to have any real influence to change it, but the church community can and should seek to highlight the virtue of healing wounds and building bridges. Most people have an inbred sense of fair play, and we can and should seek to invite other Christians to present the argument for loving our neighbour and turning the other cheek. Many Christian churches have opportunities to be involved with a Christian forum, and we could engage with other faiths in such a collective, to demonstrate the common values of all faiths. Our theme this year offers such an opportunity to be inclusive and respectful of all creeds and no creed.



One of the wonders of Jesus was the way He made the despised Samaritan the commended good neighbour (Luke 10:25-37). How were the Jewish listeners to respond? The Samaritan was educated, kind and generous; he reached out to the traveller and was hospitable and inclusive. The unidentified victim in the parable, who was mugged and left to die, represents the poor and the homeless in today's world. They are the voiceless and the helpless in every country and community, and Jesus challenges the Jewish listeners of His day, and all who read the parable today, to be compassionate and just towards whoever has fallen by the wayside. It is only then that peace will overcome conflict. Justice needs to be grace-filled and merciful – with a willingness to pay for the care of the one who 'fell into the hands of robbers'.

The arrogance of greed needs to feel the pain of the fallen, the sufferers and those who cannot help themselves. Racial justice can only be realised when society reaches out to those in need and accepts that the cost will be borne by all. It is then, and then only, that real harmony will prevail.

2. TO ALL THE PEOPLE
REVD PHILIP T. SUMNER

Many will remember the election of Pope Leo in May 2025. His first words to the people gathered in St Peter's Square and to the watching world were words of peace. These words presented us with what has become a major theme of his papacy. 'To all people,' he said, 'wherever they may be, to all nations, to the whole earth; peace be with you.' In the same month, he addressed journalists at an audience in Rome, quoting Matthew 5:9: 'Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.' He then went on to say that peace begins with each one of us, in the way we look at others, listen to others and speak about others.

The final document from the Universal Synod in 2024 suggested a similar approach. Peace, it stated, is something that we build together. This same document encouraged dialogue and encounter: 'Listening to those who suffer exclusion and marginalisation strengthens the Church's awareness that taking on the burden of wounded relationships is part of its mission.'

There's a world-renowned Mennonite peacemaker from the USA called John Paul Lederach. In his book, *The Moral Imagination*, he describes an important strategy for peacemaking.[ix] It involves much listening to one another's stories. He speaks of learning the art of peacemaking from the way a spider builds a web. The spider identifies the anchor points in an area and then begins to build the web using those anchor points. In peacemaking terms, the anchor points are the people of influence within their own communities (though not necessarily people of political or financial power). Lederach then suggests bringing these 'influencers' together with others from across the whole spectrum of the wider community. This could be people of different ethnicities or faiths, people who are often excluded or alienated by others, people of different age groups and different political viewpoints. These 'anchor points' are then given the opportunity to listen to each other's stories, which can often be stories of injustice and hurt. As they then return to their own communities, they carry with them a greater sense of understanding, and the web of cohesion and peace begins to form organically.

But how can we listen to people's sense of injustice if we don't even meet with them? When people feel under attack from the rest of society, they can often withdraw into segregated communities. A powerful symbol of peacemaking, for me, is the pedestrian bridge across the River Foyle in Northern Ireland. This was opened in 2011 and links a predominantly Unionist area with a predominantly Nationalist one. It stands in complete contrast to the high so-called 'peace walls' that separate one community from another in Belfast. The bridge across the River Foyle is asymmetrical in design, intending to symbolise two people shaking hands. It seems to have worked in creating a neutral and well-used thoroughfare.

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ix John Paul Lederach, *The Moral Imagination: The Art and Soul of Building Peace* (Oxford University Press, 2005).



A principle of bridge-building is that the foundations on both sides must be good and firm. This extends to the metaphorical bridge-building between two groups of people. If you simply bring people together with the naïve understanding that, basically, we are all the same, it could be a recipe for disaster. If people are insecure in who they are, they will tend to build poor relationships with others. It is so important, in building cohesion, that people recognise the similarities to be found in all communities, and also that they acknowledge and respect the differences. To achieve good engagement between communities we must address the identity issues, enabling each other to have a real sense of self-respect and belonging.

The wave of populism that has recently swept over many parts of the world tends to result in the scapegoating of whole groups of people because of the failings of some. Those groups are then blamed for many of the problems of wider society. This scapegoating further attacks the self-worth of those targeted and drives them into even greater segregation and alienation. This is something that we all have a responsibility to recognise and address if we are to be peacemakers and agents of justice.

YOU ARE THE SALT OF THE EARTH, BUT IF SALT HAS LOST ITS TASTE, HOW CAN ITS SALTINESS BE RESTORED? IT IS NO LONGER GOOD FOR ANYTHING BUT IS THROWN OUT AND TRAMPLED UNDER FOOT.

Matthew 5:13



SECTION FIVE

TAKE ACTION: ACTIVITIES AND RESOURCES FOR CONGREGATIONS

ACTIVITIES FOR CONGREGATIONS

1. THE PEACE AND JUSTICE TREE

For this activity, you will need: A large sheet of A3 paper, additional paper cut into the shape of leaves, colouring pens.

First draw, colour in and then cut out a large image of a tree from the A3 paper. Also colour in the leaves (or use green paper).

FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

Ask the children and young people the following questions:

- What does peace look like to you?
- What does justice look like to you?
- What helps people to feel as if they belong?

Get the children and young people to write their responses on the leaves, and stick them on the tree.

FOR DISCUSSION

For the children, you could ask them:

- What makes a good friend?
- What would make our school/church a fair place for everyone?

For the adults, you could:

- Have a discussion about how best to treat everyone fairly, and think about what is needed to make sure all can participate in our society equally.
- Discuss what we can do to help our communities grow in peace and justice.

2. BUILDING BRIDGES

For this activity, invite the participants to form small groups. You will need cardboard, paper or building blocks. The challenge is to build a bridge between two sides described as:

'Us ➔ Everyone belongs'.

Encourage all participants to have a discussion on what can build bridges between people:

- Listening
- Friendship
- Learning about other cultures
- Challenging unfairness
- Forgiveness
- Speaking up
- Sharing
- Welcoming

Give each group different amounts of materials for this task. When they have finished, ask how that affected their ability to build the bridge. This should enable everyone to have a calm conversation about fairness and uneven opportunities.

3. A 'WHERE DO I STAND?' ACTIVITY

Put signs around the room:

Strongly agree – Agree – Not sure – Disagree – Strongly disagree

Read out the following statements:

- Everyone should be treated fairly.
- Some people are more important than others.
- It is important to speak up when someone is being treated unfairly.
- Your neighbour is the person who lives next door.
- You can be peaceful without always needing to be silent.
- Learning about other people's experiences is not that important.
- Sometimes fairness means giving people different things to help them have an equal chance.

After each statement, invite people to stand near the sign of their choosing and then to explain the reason for their choice.

FOR CHILDREN

Ensure that the language is very simple and avoid putting anyone under pressure to disclose personal experiences.

4. WHAT DOES JESUS SAY ABOUT JUSTICE?

FOR CHILDREN

Choose a few short passages from the Bible and give each group a different one to explore. The possibilities include:

- Micah 6:8: 'Do justice, and … love kindness, and … walk humbly with your God.'
- Luke 10:25-37: The good Samaritan
- Matthew 5:9: 'Blessed are the peacemakers.'
- Galatians 3:28: 'There is no longer Jew or Greek.'

Ask each group:

- What does this passage tell us about God?
- What does it tell us about how we should treat other people?
- What would this look like in our church?
- What could a child do? What could an adult do?

5. PEACE IN OUR HANDS

For this activity, give each child, young person and adult a small 'hand' made of paper.

Ask, 'What one thing can you write on your paper hand to make the world a more peaceful and just place?'

Examples could be:

- Kindness
- Courage
- Listening
- Friendship
- Speaking up
- Welcome
- Patience
- Learning

PRAYER

Everyone writes one of the above, or something different, on their paper hand. You can either create a display with the various hands or ask each person to bring their hand forward during prayers that can be said for peace and justice in our communities.

RESOURCES

Below is a list of resources for Racial Justice Sunday. While the list is by no means exhaustive, it contains books, reports and toolkits by Christian authors who provide both the informed and the uninitiated alike with a better understanding of racial-justice-related matters and their significance on these shores and elsewhere.

BOOKS

- Adedibu, Babatunde. 2012. *Coat of Many Colours: The Origin, Growth, Distinctiveness and Contributions of Black Majority Churches to British Christianity*. Wisdom Summit.
- Aldred, Joe and Keno Ogbo (eds). 2010. *The Black Church in the 21st Century*. Darton, Longman and Todd.
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- Cone, James H. 2025. *God of the Oppressed*. 50th Anniversary Edition. Orbis Books.
- Conlan, S. and M. Hobbs. 1984. *New Humanity: A Study Pack for Christians in a Multi-racial Society*. Evangelical Christians for Racial Justice.
- Dixon McKenzie, Dulcie A., Pauline E. Muir and Monique M. Ingalls (eds). 2024. *Black British Gospel Music: From the Windrush Generation to Black Lives Matter*. Routledge.
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- Jennings, Willie James. 2020. *After Whiteness: An Education in Belonging* (Theological Education Between the Times). SPCK.
- Judson, Tim. 2025. *The White Bonhoeffer: A Postcolonial Pilgrimage*. SCM Press.
- Leech, Kenneth. 1988. *Struggle in Babylon: Racism in the Cities and Churches of Britain*. Sheldon Press.
- Lindsay, Ben. 2019. *We Need to Talk About Race: Understanding the Black Experience in White Majority Churches*. SPCK.
- Louis, E. P. (ed). 2023. *We Will Repay: The Biblical Case for Reparations*. CTBI.
- Louis, E. P. 2025. *Black, British and De-Christian: Message to the Mainstream*. SCM Press.
- McDonald, Chine. 2022. *God Is Not a White Man: And Other Revelations*. Hodder and Stoughton.
- McKinley, Philip. 2024. *From George Berkeley, to George Floyd, to George Nkencho: The Church of Ireland and Black Theology* (Braemor Studies Series: Number 15). Church of Ireland Publishing.
- Paynter, Helen and Maria Power (eds). 2024. *The Church, The Far Right, and The Claim to Christianity*. SCM Press.
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- Reddie, Anthony G. 2025. *Living Black Theology: Decolonizing Knowledge*. Oxford University Press.
- Reddie, Anthony G. and Carol Troupe (eds). 2023. *Deconstructing Whiteness, Empire and Mission*. SCM Press.
- Reddie, Richard S. 2011. *Martin Luther King Jr: History Maker*. Lion.
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- Roach, Jason and Jessamin Birdsall. 2022. *Healing the Divides: How Every Christian Can Advance God's Vison for Racial Unity and Justice*. The Good Book Company.
- Sookhdeo, Patrick (ed). 1974. *All One in Christ: The Biblical View of Race*. Marshall, Morgan and Scott.
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- Walton, Heather, R. Ward and M. Johnson. 1985. *A Tree God Planted: Black People in British Methodism*. Ethnic Minorities in Methodism Working Group.

REPORTS

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- Committee on Black Anglican Concerns. 1991. *Seeds of Hope: Report of a Survey on Combating Racism in the Dioceses of the Church of England*.
- Christian Aid. 2020. *Black Lives Matter Everywhere*.
- Churches Together in Britain and Ireland. 2020. *Racial Justice Champions*.
- The Holy See. 2020. *Fratelli Tutti: Encyclical on Fraternity and Social Friendship.* Orbis.
- Faith and Society, The Baptist Union of Great Britain. 2021. *I Can't Breathe: Baptists Reflecting on Racial Justice in 2020*.
- The Church of England. 2021. *From Lament to Action*.
- The Church of Scotland – Mission Forum. *Migrant and Multicultural Church*.
- The Irish Council of Churches. 2024. *From Every Nation? A Handbook for a Congregation's Journey from Welcome to Belonging*.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- Churches Together in England. Kingdom over Nation: An ecumenical response to Christian Nationalism with contributions from across the traditions. https://cte.org.uk/working-together/kingdom-over-nation/
- Churches Together in Britain and Ireland (CTBI): https://ctbi.org.uk
- CTBI's resources for Racial Justice Sunday provide a fulsome understanding of this annual celebration.
- Baptist Union: Visions of Colour: www.baptist.org.uk/Groups/379637/Visions_of_Colour.aspx
- The Baptist Union's Visions of Colour resource contains material that can be used throughout the year, including Black History Month.
- Evangelical Alliance: 10-step Roadmap to Racial Diversity and Unity: https://www.eauk.org/what-we-do/networks/one-people-commission/10-step-roadmap-to-racial-diversity-and-unity

churches together

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