



Peace Sunday

20th September 2015

Activities & sermon ideas



**Fellowship of
Reconciliation**
Nonviolence In Action

This resource provides suggestions for promoting peace issues in your church through sermons, talks or campaigns.

For many Christians, justice is the most important lens through which we can look at the Bible. Please use these prayers and homily notes as you see fit, to help people better understand how we can be the radical peacemakers Christ calls us to be.

We've included ideas for things to do in all-age services, Sunday School, Youth Groups or "children's moments" during the service before young people leave for their classes. Feel free to adjust them to suit your group.

There are also campaign ideas if you're feeling inspired to put what you've seen into action. We champion active nonviolence and would encourage people to join FoR as a way of experiencing an active faith rooted in peace and justice, and to see that you are not alone in your conviction.

We hope that, by specifying a particular day (Sunday closest to the United Nations day of peace, 21st September), people will feel connected to others celebrating together on the same day.

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Please consider holding a collection for the work of FoR during your Peace Sunday service.

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Proverbs 31:10-31

This passage is, at first, problematic for the 21st century. It seems to come squarely out of a patriarchal tradition, where the wife did all the work while her husband went into town for Important Meetings (v. 23). A good wife, apparently, must be a combination of Florence Nightingale, Emma Thompson, Anita Roddick and Angelina Jolie, while being dutiful and subservient. On deeper investigation, the passage opens up an understanding of humanity of which we need to be reminded.

The book of Proverbs is a collection of sayings and poems from the Wisdom tradition, gathered in Israel from the eighth century to the third century BC. This passage is an acrostic poem: each verse starts with a successive letter of the Hebrew alphabet. The passage comes right at the end of the book of Proverbs and many scholars see it as a summation of what has gone before, a picture of Wisdom for us to aspire to.

The Wisdom tradition runs through the Old Testament (the Hebrew Scriptures) giving a healthy corrective to some of the familiar, more harsh and warlike passages. Many see Jesus as continuing and manifesting the Wisdom tradition. Canadian theologian Cynthia Bourgeault said:

[Jesus] is the first truly integral teacher to appear on this planet. As we take a fresh look at these teachings at once familiar and strange, we're catapulted forward again along a path that rings with the power of truth.¹

Wisdom is personified as radical and vital. One of my favourite verses in the Old Testament reads:

'The beginning of wisdom is this: Get wisdom, and whatever else you get, get insight.' (Prov 4.7)

Wisdom is female, countering the traditionally masculine aspects of the divine seen so clearly in Old Testament stories – warlike, aggressive, destructive. But the picture of the ideal wife offered in these verses is by no means submissive or oppressed. She is clever, thoughtful, a good businesswoman, generous and inclusive. 'Strength and dignity are her clothing, and she laughs at the time to come.' (Prov 31.25). Above all, 'She opens her mouth with wisdom, and the teaching of kindness is on her tongue.'

So this passage is appropriate for Peace Sunday because it offers a vision of humanity, and an understanding of God, at odds with dominant culture. It calls us to be careful stewards of the land and the people who live on it, to resist warlike behaviour; to be part of a society which is at peace.

What can we do which is wise, for Peace Sunday, in a world which seems to slip ever-deeper into violence? Challenge the might of military spending in our economy? Seek greater understanding between faiths, through links with other local places of worship? Support those caring for victims of war? Above all, pray for peace, throughout the world and among the nations.

Giles Goddard is an Anglican priest and a canon of Southwark Cathedral

¹ The Wisdom Jesus: transforming heart and mind. New Seeds Books, 2008.

Psalm 1

Incantation of Hebrew psalms constantly filled the Temple. The murmuring of these sacred words was like a musical hum. They were memorised and recited and became soul words, ancient teachings written on the heart. And the reverberation of the poetry of the psalmists has come down to us through the generations, like the sound of waves breaking gently on the shore or wind rustling through the leaves of the trees.

The righteous, those whose ear is open, hear God in these murmurings. God's message, the law of the Lord, constantly pumps in their heart. Jesus, the gentle Man of Nazareth, said the law of the Lord is to follow the way of the Lord which means to live closely with God. The ultimate law is the law of love and the value of the law is only when it is written on the heart. The law of love is the basis of seeking reconciliation and trying to make peace.

The psalmist prompts us to imagine a farmer winnowing the grain. The wheat is thrown in the air with a pitch fork. The grain, the kernel, the heart full of goodness is collected and ground into flour for bread. The chaff is that out of which the heart has been taken. There is no goodness in it and it is blown away in the wind.

In contrast those in whom the law of the Lord is written on their hearts are like flourishing trees, with deep roots, fruit in its season and leaves that do not wither or blow away.

St John Chrysostom, in the 4th century, said the psalms came first, middle and last in Christian worship. Candidates for ordination learnt all the psalms by heart. We pray that these words of the psalmist be the murmurings of our heart and each leaf of the tree, nourished by streams of living water, be a message of peace.

Barbara Calvert is a Methodist Minister

Jeremiah 11: 18-20

Jeremiah was a reluctant prophet, called by God firstly to ask Israel to repent (Jer 3) and then to show the people of Israel that their capital city, Jerusalem would be destroyed on account of their sin (Jer 6). One can see that almost anybody would be reluctant to deliver that message and perform that task. Imagine being asked to wander around England, announcing the imminent destruction of London on account of the failure of its people to repent. Even worse, the sin of the people of Israel was not something that the Israelites could entirely control. Part of it had been inherited from a previous generation (Jer 44), in the manner of the environmental destruction that we pass on today.

Jeremiah is insistent that the people of Judah return to Yahweh and abandon the false god, Baal, who is known for requiring human sacrifice (Jer 19:5), prostitution and self-injury (1 Ki 18:28). If this isn't starting to sound familiar, it should. Modern day Christian complicity in war, violent struggle and treating people as property has not emerged from a vacuum of previous good behaviour. The practice of reading the bible as those who are in power (rather than those who are or stand with the oppressed) has meant that many Christians have assumed that God needs their participation in the violent mechanisms of maintaining empire through armies or arms trading or complicity through silence.

In these few verses, the first of seven "Laments", Jeremiah complains to God of the suffering that he must endure (on behalf of Judah) for announcing divine judgement. The laments follow the pattern of those offered in the Psalms, but they also prefigure those offered by Jesus over the city of Jerusalem in the gospels. On one occasion, Jesus wept for the inhabitants of Jerusalem, lamenting that they still did not understand what would bring the city peace (Lk 19:41-43). The Psalmist's laments and those of Jeremiah and Jesus might lead us to reflect that lament as a form of prayer should take us beyond participating in demonstrations or weeping behind closed doors. Lament is not self-pity, but a cry from the heart that God's justice would prevail and that Jerusalem, the church and ultimately, the world, might be restored to God.

Delving more deeply into Jeremiah's lament, one can see that it is a formulaic liturgical action comprising complaint, a profession of faith and a petition to God. Jeremiah's words can shape the questions we ask ourselves in order to form our own lament:

1. **Complaint**- Jeremiah laments the pain of having been shown the evil deeds of the people (v18). How do we share in the burdens of today's prophets who cry out against the evil they see perpetrated by church and state? Do we heed them? Who do we identify as prophets? The peace activist priest Philip Berrigan once said, "The poor show us who we are and the prophets tell us who we could be, so we hide the poor and kill the prophets."

Jeremiah also pleads his own lack of knowledge about those plotting against him, demonstrating a humility or meekness about his own actions. He describes himself as a "lamb lead to the slaughter", which should immediately recall the reader to Isaiah's prophecy about Jesus (Is 53).

2. **Profession of faith** - In verse 20, Jeremiah recalls the goodness of God who "judgest rightly". When we lament, do we do it in a way that brings us closer to God? After we have offered our complaint before God, are we able to understand God's judgement as the obverse side of God's mercy? Our sin and complicity makes us blind to the goodness of God, but lament should lead us back into God's arms.

3. **Petition**- The third portion of Jeremiah's lament is his call upon God to act (Jer 11:20). Jeremiah requests God's "vengeance" on them (be that those who've threatened his life or those who those who've wronged God). It is important to understand that Jeremiah is not so much seeking revenge as trusting in the judgement of God.

Likewise, when we lament, we seek not to will violence upon others, but to take persecution and frustration to God. This is important insofar as it makes God the judge of history, and not us. Let our cry at sunset emerge, as it has through the ages at Evensong in the Anglican tradition... "Give peace in our time, O Lord. Because there is none other that fighteth for us, but only thou, O God."

Sources: I drew helpfully from the suggestions about Jeremiah at:
<http://www.bibleinterp.com/opeds/jerem357905.shtml>

Angela Rayner is an Anglican rabble-rouser based in South London

Psalm 54

I love the Psalms for their very human quality; they say much about God but perhaps even more about us. Their frankness can be at once comforting and uncomfortable; who hasn't secretly hoped, if not prayed, for misfortune and embarrassment to befall those who cause us harm, anger or irritation? To be proven right in front of everyone? Reading a Psalm like this one can make us cringe in the way that reading back over old journal entries can; the complaining, the self-righteousness and the desire for retribution and personal glory belie the truthful, flawed characters of our secret hearts.

Often when the Psalms are used for corporate worship, or even in personal devotions, verses carrying the sentiment of "repay my enemies" are piously edited out – and understandably so; they seem distinctly at odds with the loud and clear "love your enemies" teachings and example of Jesus. However, there is a richness and a witness to these and other uncomfortable texts the Bible holds. We may need to acknowledge that they are flawed, even shameful; but, like our old journal entries, they are a part of our story, and a reminder that our story is as yet unfinished; we are still being redeemed, still being transformed.

The Psalmist writes from the ego but also from heart. The confidence with which he prays remind us of the obvious: why be anything but honest with God? We know that peace begins with us. We know that in order not to pass on and multiply the hurt we receive we must allow it, and ourselves to be transformed. This work of transformation can only be done by God; and is enacted at the very heart of the Christian story, when Jesus, on the cross, took a world of suffering and pain and transformed it into love and forgiveness. This does not belittle the pain that was experienced. Before pronouncing forgiveness, Jesus cried out in agonised despair, "My God, why have you forsaken me?" On the journey towards real forgiveness, real transformation and real peace, honesty is an important place to start.

Cara Heafey is an NHS nurse and a member of the United Reformed Church

James 3:13 – 4:3, 7 – 8a

Text: 3:18 “And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace for those who make peace”, echoing the beatitude; “Blessed are the peacemakers for they will be called children of God” (Matt. 5:9)

James is discussing the characteristics of true wisdom and the results of worldly wisdom, naming the sources of the latter. True wisdom has fruits which reflect the fruits of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22-23) – note gentleness and peacefulness are in both lists. James encourages his readers/hearers to recognise that what the world calls wisdom is “earthly, unspiritual, devilish,” and to realise that conflict originates within oneself.

He picks out partiality and hypocrisy – two characteristics of our government when discussing our ‘need’ for weapons of mass destruction – as having no place in true wisdom. Partiality is expressed in the reluctance to envisage that the world would be a safer place without nuclear weapons. Hypocrisy is expecting other nations not to want to develop nuclear weapons even when we have them.

We need to be discerning at two levels:

- a) considering whether we display wisdom in our lives, i.e. would we be recognised through showing the fruits of wisdom in our behaviour?
- b) considering how we may encourage others, especially our MPs to follow our example.

James – who is nothing if not practical in his interpretation of how to lead the Christian life and, who, to Luther’s dismay, emphasised that faith needed to be revealed through ‘good works’ – gives us both a promise and advice to follow. The promise is our text. The advice is twofold, “submit yourselves to God” and “draw near to God.” (4:7,8)

I’m sure we would all appreciate a harvest of righteousness! And we can see the logic here, that working for peace brings rewards. Isaiah claims that it works in reverse as well; “The effect of righteousness will be peace, and the result of righteousness, quietness and trust forever.” (Is. 32:17)

Submitting ourselves to God sounds like a ‘good thing’, but a challenge in practice as it involves loving our enemy. Isn’t that what being a peacemaker is all about?

Diana Townsend is a retired minister in the United Reformed Church

Mark 9:30-37 Embrace The Children

We all know that the Jesus we serve died painfully at the hands of bad religion and empire: the religious leaders who lauded it over others with false morality and civil authorities who rule by military force. Whilst Jesus was explaining his death to his followers they were pretty clueless. Instead preferring to talk about themselves being great and argue about who amongst them would be greatest. Sounding somewhat like a young Muhammad Ali.

Jesus knew the way to his kingdom was through suffering, self-sacrifice and humility. He knew his kingdom was not of this world. Yet his disciples expected the messiah to be of a militaristic nature and set up his kingdom by force. It was with this in mind that the disciples wanted their positions of power, their places of prominence in a new empire. Jesus put them right. True greatness was about becoming the least and being a servant. A counter cultural turning of the world upside down as demonstrated by Jesus dying on a cross. He also demonstrated this by embracing a child in a society where children were seen as being of very little worth outside of normal family affection. They had no prestige or value in society. Yet Jesus embraces a child.

We too live in a world where children are seen to be of very little worth, with very little being said about the child deaths caused by drones and other weapons. There is astronomical expenditure on the military whilst some areas in the UK have child poverty rates higher than 80%. Not to mention mass starvation and poverty which could be eliminated if we learnt to love our enemies as we have been instructed.

Food instead of bombs might in fact make this world a safer place for all if we too could become like children and make friends instead of enemies. Is it not about time we embraced the children? If we welcome a child in Jesus name, we welcome Jesus himself. My prayer is that we make Jesus, and the one who sent him, welcome.

Gary Eagling, AKA Eagle Spits, is a trainee local Methodist preacher and a punk poet

Hymn suggestions:

- * Put peace into each other's hands (Fred Kaan)
- * Heaven shall not wait (John Bell)
- * Peace, perfect peace is the gift of Christ our Lord
- * Sing we a song of high revolt (to the tune of "Oh Christmas Tree"/"The Red Flag")
- * Jesus Christ is waiting (to the tune of "Now the Green Blade Riseth")

To the tune of "Immortal, Invisible, God Only Wise"

Illegal, immoral, God only knows why
Our leaders are choosing to blow us sky high.
It's yesterday's weapon for yesterday's war.
It's time to stop trident,
That's wot we here for.

Barbaric and evil, this bomb it must go,
The Japanese people will tell you it's so.
Flattening houses and burning through flesh,
A nuclear deterrent
Brings global distress.

Still loving and hoping, we'll stand firm in faith,
God's message is justice and fullness of life.
He flings his arms open for all on the tree,
Revealing forever
That peace is decreed.

Revised by students from Westcott House Theological College, Cambridge during their journey to Faslane nuclear base on March 8th 2007.

Original words: Walter Chalmers Smith. Tune "St Denio", trad Welsh.

Ideas for groups of young people

Sunday School: peaceful animals

- Which animal shares the most?
- Which animal thinks of others the most?
- Which is the most selfish animal?
- Which animals are the most peaceful?
- Can you draw a picture of peace?
- Does God like peace? Why?

Children's moments: "The Two Mules: Cooperation is better than conflict"

You will need: 2 children, 2 buckets/sandwiches and a scarf

There were two donkeys in a field, joined together by a piece of rope. The farmer put out two buckets of food, but accidentally put them further apart than the rope was long. The hungry donkeys, equally strong, strained at the ropes to get to their own food. Neither could, so they got hungrier and hungrier, blaming the other for their rumbling tummies. Well, they weren't getting anywhere, so they sat down for a think.

Question: What could they do so they'd both get to eat?

They realised that the rope wasn't tied to a post—the donkeys were just tied to each other. They could walk towards the food, so long as they walked together. Calmly, they walked over to one bucket, ate half each, then walked to the other bucket, ate half each and remained firm friends.

All-age worship: using our imagination

If we want to play but didn't bring any toys, what do we use? Our imagination! It's the same with talking to our friends and enemies, and even with weapons. Weapons make us less patient and imaginative at problem-solving. With the option of war to fall back, countries don't try hard enough to resolve things by talking and being kind. If we don't have weapons, we use our imagination to solve problems. People are creative without weapons, but violent and war-prone if they have them.

Youth groups: threats and violence

- Is it easier to think about short- or long-term peace?
- What do we mean by "violence"? What do we mean by "nonviolence"?
- Is a threat of physical violence, an act of violence itself?

Scenario: Your sister threatens to hit you if you play her trumpet. You know she would never hit you really because she's not like that. Does her threat put you off? Does it make you want to threaten her back?

How about nuclear weapons: if we're never going to use them, can they ever act as a deterrent? Does it make other countries want to get them?

On this day (20th September):

- **1187:** Saladin begins the Siege of Jerusalem.
- **2001:** In an address to a joint session of Congress and the American people, U.S. President George W. Bush declares a "war on terror".
- **2011:** US military ends "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" policy, allowing gay & bisexual members to work openly (*is this a win for peace, given that it means more people will join the military?*)
- **2012:** 50 people are killed and dozens injured after a gas station is bombed by the Syrian Army in Ain Issa
- **2012:** 14 people are killed in a cafe suicide bombing in Somalia
- **2013:** Greenpeace ship Arctic Sunrise is boarded by Russian military
- **Every year:** Children's day in Germany and Youth Day in Thailand

CAMPAIGN SUGGESTIONS

In 2016, the UK government plans to renew Trident, its stockpile of nuclear weapons, breaching the non-proliferation treaty signed in 1968. It's actually illegal to build nuclear weapons as it's preparation to commit mass murder. As Christians, we deplore the indiscriminate killing of civilians, which is the purpose of nuclear weapons.

Trident will cost £100billion over its lifetime—enough to pay for every A&E trip in the UK for the next 40 years. It's no use against the biggest threat to life and safety: climate change. Research into renewable energy gets 1/25 of that spent on weapons development, and 1/5 of that spent on weapons of mass destruction alone. The Red Cross says it could not clear up after a nuclear disaster.

Trident is not a deterrent and we must work hard to cancel its renewal.

What can you do?

Write to your MP. Tell them Trident is wrong on moral, legal, economic, humanitarian or security grounds. Visit for.org.uk/act for a template.

Make a square on our **drones quilt**, a project remembering the thousands of civilians killed in drone strikes. Visit for.org.uk/drones

Join FoR to get news and take part in our campaigns at for.org.uk/join-us

Make a donation to FoR. Our work relies on the generous contributions we receive from members and supporters. Please visit for.org.uk/donate

You could [set up a standing order](#) to FoR. Regular income from donations helps us plan for the future. Contributions of all sizes gratefully received.

Prayers

Loving God,

Thank you for our marvellous world.
Thank you for all living beings who dwell on it,
The plants which make it beautiful
And those who have gone before.

We are truly sorry for times we stray
Into the path of violence and hatred.
For times we fail to look out for others
Or think about long-term consequences.

We are often quick to anger and slow to listen,
Hearing what is simple and easy,
Not what is helpful and true.
Help us to listen kindly and respond with integrity.

While the UK plans to spend £100bn on nuclear weapons,
And cut public services essential to wellbeing,
Too often we stand by and watch.
Forgive our apathy, our selfishness, our inaction.

Lead us into righteous anger and active resistance,
To speak out against injustice before it leads to violence.
Help us to love our neighbour,
To see past race, age, gender, sexuality, faith or body shape.

Help us to be more like your son, Jesus Christ,
Who took direct action in the temple;
Who is friend of the poor and said,
“Blessed are the peacemakers”.

We pray this in your name,

Amen

(written by FoR for Peace Sunday 2015)

Lead me from death to Life, from falsehood to Truth.
Lead me from despair to Hope, from fear to Trust.
Lead me from hate to Love, from war to Peace.
Let Peace fill our heart, our world, our universe.
Peace, peace, peace.

Universal prayer for peace

Speaking about FoR in church: Quakers + others

We work very closely with Quaker organisations, but realise that sermon notes are not very helpful to those planning Quaker worship. Instead, we suggest giving a short talk/presentation after Meeting for Worship or during notices and suggest FoR as the organisation for the non-Quaker collection. We have leaflets, including membership forms, for those who would like to display them. Here is an outline talk—please free to adapt it:

FoR is an ecumenical Christian charity which champions disarmament in all its forms. Together with our members, we aim to address the roots of violence by seeking an end to injustice, whether social, political, environmental or economic.

FoR's current campaigns focus is scrapping Trident renewal. We feel that nuclear weapons cannot bring peace and instead harbour a world built on threat, violence and mistrust. We also feel that security would increase more with £100bn spent on the NHS, green energy, housing & education, than on weapons which will never—must never—be used.

Friends will be aware of the concerning levels of militarism creeping into society. FoR members are active in challenging this, whether by questioning the presence of the armed forces in civilian events or by resisting the use of church venues who host arms dealers. FoR equips and resources its members to take action in their faith communities and beyond. We have an annual conference, where members explore Christ's call to be peacemakers and learn practical ways to put this into action.

FoR has a special ongoing project, the *International Peacemakers Fund*. Our IPF enables nonviolent grassroots groups overseas to rebuild their communities after armed conflict has affected the area. Projects FoR has supported include summer schools, women's leadership courses and a nonviolence handbook for young people. Most of the money for the fund comes from donations by FoR members and supporters.

FoR is a membership organisation and the easiest way to get involved is to join our community. Members receive resources, come to events, take part in campaigns and meet other people working peacefully for change.

For more information, visit www.for.org.uk or call Emma on 01865 250781. FoR is based in Oxford and they love having visitors!

FoR is an ecumenical Christian charity. We're committed to working nonviolently towards disarmament and addressing all forms of injustice, the root of violence.

Become a member by visiting for.org.uk/join-us

We support grassroots peacemakers in areas affected by conflict through our International Peacemakers Fund. Read more at for.org.uk/ipf



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