Service of Remembrance

[It is envisaged that this Service of Remembrance will be used in the evening, but changing a few words and phrases would make it suitable for morning use. While it has been prepared for Monday August 4, 2014, to commemorate the beginning of the First World War, it could also be used on Remembrance Sunday or 11 November in any year. The congregation is asked to join in the responses in italics.]

Welcome to this service of Remembrance, in which we dedicate to the keeping of Almighty God the men and women of all nationalities who have given their lives in the service of their countries; we ask God’s forgiveness for the conflicts of the past and for the violence in our world today, and we pray for peace.

The peace of the Lord be always with you

*And also with you*

Let us pray

Lord of all creation, You are greater than anything which we can know or imagine, more powerful than any human being or any tool that we have made, more beautiful than all that our eyes can see or our minds comprehend, more loving towards us than the love we find in any human relationship. You made us in Your image and came into our world, suffered and died for us; You uphold us with Your loving care, meet us when we are far off and constantly guide our feet towards our home in You.

Be with us this evening as we come before You; guide and inspire us with the presence of Your Holy Spirit, that our thoughts, our words and our worship may now and always be to Your praise and glory.

Lord, in Your mercy *Hear our prayer*

[Hymn: God of mercy, God of grace]

[The congregation is seated]

Few of us have first-hand knowledge of international conflict, and we need to be aware of how it was experienced by those who fought in the Great War, and how it is felt today by those who serve in the Armed Forces. We must allow the voices of the past to help us to understand, and of the many who have left us their own words, we listen to just a few:

In 1914, a British soldier was just sixteen years old and ready to lie his way to the front.

'Ahead is the unknown - danger, hardship, wounds, perhaps death, but these possibilities leave me unmoved. I can only think of heroics, of battles won, of returning heroes, glorious deeds...This is my great adventure.'

His dream of glory lasted just four days.
'Zero day has come and gone and I have lived a hundred years. Four short days ago, I was a youngster with all the ideals of youth, but now I have changed. Everything seems different. Where we are going or what is to happen to us next, I know not and care less. It is sufficient that we are leaving that hell behind.'

As the war progressed, there was little sense of its glory. A young officer recorded what he saw around him:

'The whole countryside was featureless; everything had been obliterated. It resembled a desert covered with shell holes full of water and dead men, and mules pointing rotting limbs to the sky. Many had gone below the surface for ever, and the smell of decaying corpses, gas and cordite made it a place for strong stomachs. So bad was the earth that it took up to twelve hours to extricate a wounded man from the front to a point where an ambulance could reach him. There were duckboard tracks, but to step off them was to invite being bogged down, and of course they were frequently breached by the continuous shell fire.'

It is easy to forget that the victims of war were not just those who fought, but those whose homes were destroyed and who were left destitute. There were also the families who lost their loved ones, mourned their loss, and had to go on with their lives in spite of grief and sometimes material as well as emotional hardship.

Back in 1914, a young cavalryman noticed the plight of the dispossessed, watching entire families on the move, carrying all they could manage and walking away from devastation. He said:

'It was a terrible sight, a morass of jumbled, doubtless treasured belongings piled high onto people who, almost without exception, looked utterly forlorn.'

And in 2007, a ninety-seven year old woman laid a wreath at her father's grave in France. Her note said:

'Thank you for five years of real happiness...I've missed you all my life.'

[Silence may be kept]

Let us pray

Lord, have mercy

\textit{Christ have mercy}

Lord, have mercy

Lord, we remember those who suffered and died in the many conflicts of our history, those who never recovered from their wounds or from mental or emotional trauma, and we commend them and those who loved them into Your keeping.

Lord, in Your mercy \textit{Hear our prayer}
Lord, we pray for all who are involved in conflict today, remembering especially the people of [Syria, Afghanistan, South Sudan, the Central African Republic]. We ask Your mercy on those who are wounded in body, mind or spirit, on the millions of refugees, on those who are bereaved, on the children who will carry the scars of war on their souls for the rest of their lives.

Lord, in Your mercy  *Hear our prayer*

Lord, none of us is without sin. Forgive us for every act of aggression, for the ways in which we create barriers between us and exclude those who are different from ourselves, for our failure to show mercy and compassion, our reluctance to follow Your example of self-giving.

Lord, in Your mercy  *Hear our prayer*

Lord, we have sinned against Your love

*Hear us and forgive us*

We have allowed enmity and aggression to flourish in our world

*Hear us and forgive us*

In our own society, we have not loved our neighbours as ourselves

*Hear us and forgive us*

Even in Your Church, we have known separation and intolerance

*Hear us and forgive us*

In our own lives, we have ignored Your call and followed our own way

*Hear us and forgive us*

Grant us Your compassion, Your forgiveness and the grace of Your Holy Spirit

Lord in Your mercy  *Hear our prayer*

*Amen*

We say the Lord’s Prayer together:

*Our Father, which art in heaven*

*Hallowed be thy name.*

*Thy kingdom come,*

*Thy will be done*

*On earth as it is in heaven.*
Give us this day our daily bread
And forgive us our trespasses
As we forgive those who trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation
But deliver us from evil
For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory
For ever and ever. Amen

[Hymn: Dear Lord and Father of mankind]

[The congregation sits for the readings]

OT reading: Micah 4: 1-4
This is the word of the Lord

Thanks be to God

[Silence may be kept]

Rightly, we remember the horrors of war, but even in the midst of terrible suffering, there could be compassion and comradeship, and an awareness of the presence of God. A soldier wrote:

'My pal was mortally wounded only a yard from me. I showed him his wife's photo and read her last letter to him, and part of St John 17, and so passed away a real Christian soldier. It was with a heavy heart and wet eyes that I left him with the snow falling on his body. All around lay dead and wounded, and I did what I could... You will gather how we suffered when I tell you that out of forty-two in our platoon, only eleven are left and I am one of them.'

NT reading: St John 17: 20 to end of chapter
This is the word of the Lord

Thanks be to God

[Silence may be kept]

A psalm for today [read antiphonally between priest or officiant and people]

1 Father, You have created all things in joy;
You saw Your handiwork and it was good.

2 You have created us in Your own image;
Your Spirit breathed in us to give us life.

3 You have given to us Your gifts of truth, of beauty and of joy, of constant love.

4 All things come from You, and of Your own can we, inspired by grace, give back to You.

5 But in our pride, our greed, our lust for power, we have destroyed the glory You have lent us.

6 The lark still sings her music to the skies but underneath are pain and death of friends and endless mud-bespattered agony.

7 Father, forgive the suffering that we have caused each other, caused to You.

8 Ours are the nails that hold You to the Cross; ours the uncaring hearts that leave You there.

9 Father, forgive us, for we know too well ours is the sin, Yours the redeeming love.

10 Grant that we all may know the healing power of Your great resurrection, and our own.

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

After war, there is peace, but moments of peace happened between enemies even during the terrible Battle of the Somme:

Two men climbed out of a British front-line trench; they weren't even carrying a white flag.

'A stretcher was then passed up to them and they proceeded to carry it ploddingly into no man's land. Hundreds, perhaps thousands, of eyes must have been upon them and all firing of any sort ceased. Complete, uncanny silence descended like a pall as the two men trudged steadily on and stopped beside a body lying on the ground. They lifted it
onto a stretcher and plodded slowly back the way they had come. The silence remained unbroken until they were safe.'

[Silence may be kept]

At the end of all conflicts, there needs to be reconciliation. Harry Patch, the last surviving veteran of the trenches before his death in 2009, insisted that remembrance was always for the men 'on both sides of the line'; he talked to young people about the need for forgiveness and reconciliation, and showed this in his own life by shaking hands with the last German veteran, Charles Kuentz. He was, he said, very happy to shake Charles's hand.

We pray for reconciliation in the conflicts of our day, between nations, between races, between religions, between all who oppress others and all who are themselves oppressed. May we all live and depart in peace, having seen the salvation of our God.

Nunc dimittis  [The congregation stands to say or sing this together]

Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace: according to thy word.

For mine eyes have seen: thy salvation;

Which thou hast prepared: before the face of all people;

To be a light to lighten the Gentiles: and to be the glory of thy people Israel.

Glory be to the Father and to the Son: and to the Holy Ghost;

as it was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be: world without end. Amen.

[The congregation sits]

Our final reading from the Great War is a beautiful passage by a soldier in the Royal Engineers, aware of the beauty of God's creation and of the destruction caused by man:

'I stood at the entrance to my dugout. A slender moon was setting in the west, and a faint glow lingered there - tender, delicate colouring. Elsewhere, the sky was limpid with the colourlessness of twilight ere the stars began to peep. The grey veil of nightfall mercifully hid the desolation of the landscape...Two men were talking quietly. The murmur of their voices came to my ears; somewhere a fire began to twinkle...one's eyes went to the peaceful west. The darkest day was past; already it seemed lighter at this hour than it had been, and there floated the slim crescent of the new moon...the darkness deepened; far away the first star shell of the evening flared up and lit the battlefield...somewhere a man died.'

[Silence may be kept]

Let us pray
Lord, there is so much hatred and aggression in Your world today; we despoil the beauty You have created for our pleasure, the natural world around us that You have put into our keeping. Forgive our carelessness with Your creation and our disregard of the effects of our greed and self-interest on other people's lives and well-being.

Lord, in Your mercy  *Hear our prayer*

Lord, even in the midst of conflict, there are men and women who reflect Your love. We thank You for every act of courage, of generosity, of selflessness. We thank You for those who, with no thought for their own safety, bring medical care to the injured, help to restore homes and hospitals and schools where there is great need. Grant that we may be generous hearted, thoughtful and caring towards the many in our world who suffer from the effects of war and oppression.

Lord, in Your mercy  *Hear our prayer*

Lord, we commend to You the peacemakers and peace-keepers, who are Your children. Grant that where there has been enmity, there may be reconciliation, that where there has been aggression, there may be forgiveness, that where there has been hatred, there may be love. Grant that all Your people may show the care and compassion that You show to us.

Lord, in Your mercy  *Hear our prayer*

[Hymn: O strength and stay, upholding all creation]

Blessing [the congregation remains standing]

May the God of peace enfold us and grant that our darkness may be transformed by His glorious light, and may the blessing of Almighty God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, be with us and all people everywhere, this night and always. Amen

[The service ends with silence]

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*This service is dedicated to my friends at Christ Church, Reading, who have encouraged and supported me in writing it.* Joan van Emden

Extracts have been taken from the following books, all by Richard van Emden: *Britain's Last Tommies* (published by Pen & Sword), *The Soldier's War*, *Boy Soldiers of the Great War*, *The Quick and the Dead*, *Meeting the Enemy*, all published by Bloomsbury.

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