

Will you strive for peace?  
We will, with God's help!

Marc Chagall, Peace



This is your daily resource to help you connect with the themes of Sunday & continue your prayers through the week. This can be done on your own or in the family group. The liturgy is based on Home Prayers found in the Book of Alternative Services (p. 687). **If you do not have a prayer book, please take & keep one for your use.**

Our devotions this week will focus on the first of the six baptismal promises we make at baptism (page 159 of the Book of Alternative Services). It is possible you have been baptised but have never made these promises. This is ok. These promises can still be adopted as you move forward in your spiritual journey with Christ.

If you would like to make these promises for the first time at St. Dunstan's, we will hold a service of dedication on February 23<sup>rd</sup> at 10am. Just let me know!

Peace on your week,

the Reverend David Taylor, Rector

## Our Fourth Baptismal Promise:

Will you strive for justice & peace among all people, &  
respect the dignity of every human being?

**We will, with God's help!**

### 1. The Preparation

*A candle is lit as someone says,*

**God of blazing light, through the power of the cross you shattered our darkness & set us free to live as your children. Give us courage & conviction, so that we may joyfully turn & follow you, led by the light that shines through Jesus Christ our Saviour. Amen.**

### 2. The Reading & Reflection

*Read the passage from Scripture then reflect using the wonder questions as your guide. This guide uses the New Revised Standard Version.*

## MATTHEW 4:12-23 – GATHERING THE COMMUNITY

*Notes on the reading:*

- *The author of the Gospel according to Matthew is interested in putting Jesus' ministry into the context of the ancient Hebrew prophets. Prophets held the vision of God before the people to help them order their life according to God's ways & encouraged those who suffered to not give up, but to look forward to the arrival of God who will come & heal them. Therefore, we have Jesus' ministry stamped with the approval of the prophet Isaiah (vv. 15 & 16).*
- *Jesus' message is the same as John the Baptist's: Repent! Live with justice & stop hurting one another! (cf. 3:2 with 4:17). We cannot overemphasize the role of John the Baptist to Jesus' ministry. John was famous in his day. He was even written about by the Jewish historian Josephus who was born around the time Jesus died. Interestingly, Josephus also provides the first account of Jesus outside of the Christian community.*
- *Jesus immediately gathers a community around him. Life is communal.*

*I wonder how the pursuit of justice & peace is an individual one.  
I wonder how the pursuit of justice & peace needs a community.  
I wonder what fishing for people looks like.  
I wonder how we can fulfill God's ancient promises of peace.*

## ISAIAH 9:1-4 – JUSTICE & PEACE ARE POLITICAL

Notes on the reading:

- Zebulun & Naphtali (v. 1) were provinces in the ancient kingdom of Israel. They were some of the first areas captured & exiled by the Assyrian army. This national trauma fueled a lot of prophetic warnings to the ancient people (live right, or else), & also inspired a prophetic longing for God to restore God's people to their homes.
- Isaiah 9 is used to describe Jesus' ministry in the Gospel according to Matthew. The ancient prophet did not look through a crystal ball to see Jesus living in Galilee. Instead the writer of Matthew aligns the ministry of Jesus with the ancient hope of restoration in Isaiah.
- Healing & restoration is not a day at the spa. Instead it is the breaking of the metaphorical yoke of servitude that has been placed on people's shoulders. The prophet likens the joy of God's people to the joy of an army victorious in war. Midian was one of the first kingdoms the ancient pilgrim people encountered in the desert & defeated in battle.

*I wonder what it takes to have peace in your heart.*

*I wonder what it takes to have peace in the world.*

*I wonder how Jesus' ministry is both internal & political.*

*I wonder what justice really looks like.*

## I CORINTHIANS 1:10-18 – PEACE BRINGS PEOPLE TOGETHER

Notes on the reading:

- Paul established the church in Corinth then left to do the same in other places. Later he heard that there were disagreements & divisions in the Corinthian church. This is the reason for his letter.
- The Greek word for Division is Schism (v. 10). The energies of the world tend to divide & scatter using whatever method it can (political, military, economic, or, in the Corinthian's case, a sense of superiority). Interestingly the Greek word for devil (the ancient personification of evil) is Diabolos which means Scatterer. God's energy, however, brings things together.
- The irony for Christians today is that the Church is clearly divided with some saying they belong to one faction, & others saying they belong to another faction (cf. v 12). Has Christ been divided (v. 13)?
- For Paul the cross is the message of the Church. It is the true power of wisdom & of God to unite the world.

*I wonder where you notice divisions in the world.*

*I wonder where we see the world coming together.*

*I wonder why the Church is divided.*

*I wonder how we bring peace into the Church & the world.*

**ISAIAH 58:1-9 – TRUE WORSHIP IS TO PRACTICE JUSTICE**

Notes on the reading:

- We stick with Isaiah to help us understand the underlying influence of the Hebrew prophets on Jesus & the early Church.
- This section of Isaiah (chapters 56-66) was written after the return of exiled Jews. It is a theological reflection on how the ancient people must re-establish good & true worship in order to avoid the same fate of their ancestors: exile.
- The practice of fasting (v. 3) was common to recall past experiences of scarcity & exile, & the need to trust in God. This is a good thing to do. But fasting must also recall the present circumstances of life, not just the past. Fasting while ignoring the needs of others or, worse, participating in the suffering of others, is abhorrent to God.
- Jesus follows this tradition when he opposes the practices of the religious leaders of his day. Jesus will help those in need even on days of fasting.

*I wonder what it means to worship God.*

*I wonder if we can love God without loving our neighbours.*

*I wonder if we can love our neighbours without loving God.*

**JOHN 20:19-29 – PEACE IS THE MESSAGE OF CHRIST**

Notes on the reading:

- Following Jesus' death & burial, his followers hid away because they were afraid. The one they had listened to & trusted was now dead. They could no longer depend on his wisdom, leadership or even the hope he promised.
- The violence of Jesus' death is important to remember. Not because it was unique, but because it was the same violence humans have experienced since the beginning of time. Humanity suffers violence & responds to it with more violence. Not so Jesus.
- 3 times the crucified Christ appears to his friends & offers peace (v. 19, 21 & 26). He does not offer scorn at their fear, at their betrayal, at their complicity in his death. Neither does he gather his friends together to plan their revenge on the "Jews" or the Romans. Instead Jesus offers peace. It is a new way of being – the resurrected life that we are invited to live into.

*I wonder if you ever wanted revenge on someone.*

*I wonder what it costs to offer peace rather than violence.*

*I wonder how we can find courage to live the way of peace.*

### 3. Prayers & the Lord's Prayer

Pray one of the litanies beginning on page 110 of the Book of Alternative Services & conclude with the Lord's Prayer.