



On your marks

Remembrance Sunday is a challenge for most children's leaders and those taking a service with children present. Many people in the congregation have no experience of living through a war; while at the same time there will of course be older members of the church family for whom this can be a very poignant and emotional occasion. Increasingly such services include mention of wars more recent than the two major world wars of the last century, including present-day fighting in Middle East. It also includes prayers for those members of the armed forces, who are part of peacekeeping initiatives in number of world trouble spots. Although it is called Remembrance Sunday there is also an increasing desire to complement the looking back with prayers for peace in the future.

The following material is offered as inspiration for those children's and worship leaders who are looking for additional elements for this Sunday, which will be inclusive of children.

Get set

Read through what it is here and decide whether you might like to use any of these approaches with your group or in a service. Each suggestion includes directions as to any additional materials that are needed.

Go!

1. For many children Remembrance Sunday will be identified most easily as Poppy Sunday. Both in church and perhaps in school at the 11th hour of the 11th day of the 11th month there is observed the customary two-minute silence to remember those who died during wars. With children and also with their parents - for thankfully at least two generations in this country have not been part of a war that affected lives as directly as did the First and Second World Wars - it is useful to direct their thoughts and prayers towards the theme of 'making peace'.
2. People see the poppy in a variety of ways:
 - It is of course the symbol of a charity fund that still cares for those who were bereaved or injured in wars.
 - It is also a way of remembering the sacrifice made by many who fought against those who would take away democratic freedoms from our world.
 - It is a sign of hope, inspired as it is by the poppy fields in Belgium, where the flowers grew on the very land that had during the First World War been battlegrounds.
 - It can also be seen as a 'vote for peace'.

Some useful verses to supplement the traditional poem (i.e. 'they shall not grow old' etc) are:

From Psalm 46: 9-10

(It is God, who)... makes wars to cease to the ends of the earth.

He breaks the bow and shatters the spear.

He burns the chariots with fire.



*Be still and know that I am God.
I am exalted among the nations. I am exalted in the earth.*

For Christians each Sunday is a Remembrance Day. It is the day when they remember the sacrifice of Jesus, who won for the entire world a different and deeper kind of peace. The following verses provide a useful introduction to a time for saying sorry in a service:

From James 4: 1, 6-7

*What causes wars and fighting among you?
Is it not your selfishness at war inside your hearts? Greed, pride, envy etc.
But God opposes the proud and gives grace to the humble.
Submit yourselves therefore to God.
Draw near to God and he will draw near to you.*

God's peace gift to us is Jesus. He is God's gift to all who will receive Him. Jesus makes peace with God for us and as we learn how to pass this gift on, we become peacemakers and peace-givers too. He empowers us to be peace-bringers.

From Matthew 5: 9

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the sons of God.

3. From Micah 4: 1- 4

In days to come the mountain where the temple stands will be the highest one of all, towering above all the hills. Many nations will come streaming to it and their people will say, 'Let us go up the Hill to the Lord, to the temple of Israel's God. For he will teach us what he wants us to do; we will walk in the paths he has chosen. For the Lord's teaching comes from Jerusalem; from Zion he speaks to his people.'

He will settle disputes among the nations, among the great powers near and far. They will hammer their swords into ploughs and their spears into pruning knives. Nations will never again go to war, never prepare for battle again. Everyone will live in peace among his own vineyards and fig trees, and no one will make him afraid. The Lord Almighty has promised this.

Some people have taken this prophecy from the Old Testament about swords being turned into ploughs very literally. The country of Mozambique was torn apart by war for many years but in recent times, following an initiative that came from the Christian Church, people have been encouraged to bring in their weapons and have them melted down and turned into useful tools and machines. Some of these weapons have even been turned into pieces of art, which have been displayed in exhibitions around the world.

To illustrate this, hand out some long pieces of fuse wire to the children. Ask them first to sculpt them into swords or guns. Some will need little encouragement! The challenge then is to unbend the wire and turn those swords and guns into something useful or beautiful. This exercise could be used alongside the reading from Micah above to explore the promise of peace that is given us.

Another way to handle this through words would be to ask the group to change the word s-l-i-n-g (as one example of an old-fashioned weapon) into the word p-e-a-c-e by changing only one letter at a time but always making each time a new word. Instead of slinging insults at each other how do we bring peace between people?

Here's one solution to this word challenge:
sling-slang-slant-plant-plane-place-peace

4. In Ephesians chapter 2:14, Jesus is described as 'our peace'. He is the one who breaks down the walls of hostility that we build between each other as nations and individuals.

To illustrate this idea ask the children to get into groups of three. Two of the three should then mime being angry or even fighting each other but freeze the scene (without any physical contact!) so that the room is full of pairs of children frozen in hostility. Now invite the third member of each group to come and put themselves in between the two who are 'at war', by stretching out their hands to keep them apart or putting their hands around each to try and bring them together. This third person is the peacemaker like Jesus. Freeze these groups of three and then ask the two who were fighting to sit down. The ones left standing will all be in some sort of frozen cross shape. It was at the cross that Jesus stretched himself out to make peace between us and God, and between us and each other.

5. When Jesus came to Jerusalem for the last time it says in Luke's gospel (Chapters 19: 42) that he not only wept over the city but also sighed and said ' If only you knew the things that really make peace '.

What things do make for peace between people? In twos or threes ask the children or, if you do this in a service, children and adults together, to list the sort of things that make peace rather than war.

To take this exercise further, then ask those groups to think what sort of statues commemorate peacemaking? There are plenty of statues in our big cities around the world that commemorate those who fought in the wars and those who were war heroes but what does a monument to peace or a statue of a peace hero look like?

6. Obtain a large world mat (such as the one available from the Early Learning Centre for the game of world twister!) or world map and lay this out in the middle of your group. In church it might be held up or a version displayed on a screen. Talk about what sort of wars are going on today around the world. Identify the parts of the world where there is fighting, perhaps using some newspaper pictures and headlines to put on or against the map.

Now invite the group either to place some poppies on those different parts of the world and turn this into a short time of prayer, or make your own poppies cut from card and stuck to short garden sticks. On each of the three main petals you could emphasise the different sorts of peace that Jesus brings - peace inside ourselves, peace between each other and peace with God.

7. Bring a blow-up globe into your group or to the worship service. Ask the children or the congregation to think of different places in the world where there are still wars and there is a

great need for peace. As they put their hands up with suggestions, toss the globe to them and ask them to hold it high while you or they say a short prayer or keep a brief silence so people can lift that part of the world to God in intercession.

8. There is a story that comes from the Middle East that is a sort of parable such as the ones that Jesus told. In fact I think it is really about Jesus himself and how he makes peace as well as about ourselves and how he wants us to be peacemakers. However let the children and congregation work out what it might mean for themselves.

You could make this story visual by printing off a series of 18 clip-art camel pictures and mounting them (first only 17 and then later add the 18th) upright in a slit along a long cardboard tube. This will help make the mathematics of the story easier to grasp!

Once upon a time there was a rich man who lived in the deserts of the Middle East. You could tell how rich he was because of what he owned and especially how many camels belonged to him. In fact he was so rich that he owned not 2, not 4, not 8, not 16... but 17 camels.

He had led a peaceful and prosperous life and so when he was very old and near to death he wrote his will, explaining how he intended to leave his wealth to his only son, his grandson and to his one nephew. The terms of the will were these: one half of his riches should go to his own son; one third should go to his grandchild and one ninth of his wealth should go to his nephew.

This seemed fair. Soon after this the rich man died. Now when it came time to dividing up the camels according to the will, the three beneficiaries ran into a problem!

(demonstrate the following with your visual aid)

- If half the camels were given to the son, then he should get eight-and-a-half camels, which would mean killing a camel!
- If a third of the camels were given to the grandson, that would mean again killing a camel so he could get five and two thirds!
- And when it came to the nephew, there was no way he could get his share unless another camel was killed.

The three of them became frustrated and soon got very angry with each other. They shouted and quarrelled and argued and even threatened to go to war over the camels. Secretly they began stockpiling their weapons and plotting their battle campaigns.

Nearby there lived a very poor man. You could tell he was very poor because he only had one camel. Although he was so poor and seemed to have no influence, he still felt he should do something to help. He wanted to stop war breaking out. He wanted to be a peacemaker. But what could he do?

He decided to offer his one and only camel into the rich man's inheritance to help sort out the problem. It was a huge sacrifice. The inheritance now consisted of 18 camels.

(demonstrate the following by adding a camel and then re-doing the maths as below!)



The three sat down and did the sums.

- Half of 18 would go to the son, so he took 9 camels.
- One third of 18 would go to the grandson so he took 6 camels.
- And one ninth of 18 would go to the nephew, so he took two camels. After each had taken his allotted number, to their great surprise there was one camel left over!
- The poor man received his camel back! He had made peace by his willingness to give up all he had and it had made all the difference and he had not lost out in the end!

I wonder what you think this story is saying to us about making peace? And about Jesus who is described as the Prince of Peace?

9. Possible songs to sing with your group or in church include:

- Make me a channel of your peace
- Peace I give to you
- All over the world the Spirit is moving
- Peace is flowing like a river