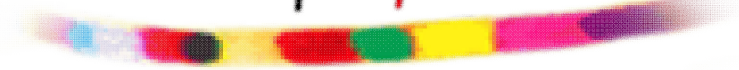


Service of the Word

In Observance of
“World Week for Peace in Palestine Israel”

Joint action for a just peace
convened by the World Council of Churches

it's time for palestine



Sunday 29 May 2011
Sixth Sunday of Easter

Introduction to the Service

The following Service of the Word liturgy has been prepared for use during World Week for Peace in Palestine Israel, 29 May through 4 June 2011. It has been designed by members of the Palestine Israel Ecumenical Forum, an initiative of the World Council of Churches (WCC). All WCC member churches are invited to encourage their congregations to use this liturgy as the basis for a service of worship during the week.

World Council of Churches Policy on Palestine/Israel

“Negotiating a just peace under the rule of law is the strongest option for ensuring the well-being and security of both the Israeli and Palestinian peoples. This is the core of World Council of Churches policy toward the conflict. It is a conviction that has grown as (more than) 40 years of illegal occupation of Palestinian territory has claimed lives, distorted the rights of both peoples and deepened the conflict between them. In making policy the WCC is attentive to those who are suffering, recognizes UN resolutions as the basis for peace and is watchful that the Geneva Conventions determine the occupying power's responsibilities in the meantime.” (From [“World Council of Churches Policy on Palestine/Israel.”](#))

Words from the Rev. Dr. Olav Fykse Tveit, General Secretary of the World Council of Churches

“Recently, I had the opportunity to visit the Holy Land. The visit was intensive and enriching....The witness of the churches of Jerusalem is a witness of what it means to carry the cross and live in the life of the resurrection today. Even as I was inspired by Jerusalem for myself as a Christian believer, representing many Christians all around the world, I also felt the pain that today Jerusalem is not the city of peace, justice and joy. However, it is a symbol for the nature of ecumenical faith and witness in the world today, and it is a specific focal point for the work of the ecumenical movement at this moment in time. We are called to pray for the peace of Jerusalem and to work for the peace of Jerusalem and all peoples living there. The role of the World Council of Churches in this particular context reflects our faith – what unites us every day in our work, how we order our lives together, how together in Jerusalem and other places in the world we as Christians can become a sign of the cross and the resurrection, and a genuine expression of what we have received. “

ENTRANCE

Welcome

The worship leader welcomes the congregation to the service. The leader reminds the congregation that we have gathered in order to pray for peace for all those in Palestine and Israel who suffer from injustice, oppression, and fear. We ask God to change the hearts of those who do evil, overturn the institutions of injustice, and restore the lands of Palestine and Israel to a place of peace.

Hymn

For this worship service, the worship leader is encouraged to choose hymns and songs from the congregation's tradition that reflect on the theme of peace, or that relate to one or more of the Scripture lessons for the day.

Prayer of Confession

The leader reminds the congregation that although we pray for those who suffer, we are also at times guilty of causing the suffering of others. So we begin by asking God's forgiveness of our own sins.

L: In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

P: Amen.

L: Aware of our own sinfulness, yet believing in the power of the Triune God to forgive and restore, let us now confess our sins, in the presence of God and of one another.

P: Gracious God, have mercy on us. In your compassion, forgive us our sins, known and unknown, things done and things left undone. Redeem us for those times when we have not chosen the path of peace, not given witness to Jesus Christ, the Prince of Peace. Uphold us by your Spirit, so that we may live and serve you in newness of life, to the honor and glory of your holy name; through Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.

Words of Assurance

The leader assures the congregation that God forgives those who truly repent of their sins. God can change the hearts of those who seek Him, and commit their lives to justice and truth.

L: May Almighty God have mercy on us, forgive us all our sins through our Lord Jesus Christ, strengthen us in all goodness, and by the power of the Holy Spirit, keep us in eternal life.

P: Amen.

PROCLAMATION AND RESPONSE

The Scripture readings for this service are taken from the Revised Common Lectionary, Year A, for the Sixth Sunday of Easter.

First Lesson: Acts 17:22-31

Luke, the author of the Acts of the Apostles, quotes the apostle Paul, who teaches that God commands all people to repent, for the time is coming when we will be judged by our righteousness.

Then Paul stood in front of the Areopagus and said, "Athenians, I see how extremely religious you are in every way. For as I went through the city and looked carefully at the objects of your worship, I found among them an altar with the inscription, 'To an unknown god.' What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you. The God who made the world and everything in it, he who is Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in shrines made by human hands, nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mortals life and breath and all things. From one ancestor he made all nations to inhabit the whole earth, and he allotted the times of their existence and the boundaries of the places where they would live, so that they would search for God and perhaps grope for him and find him—though indeed he is not far from each one of us. For 'In him we live and move and have our being'; as even some of your own poets have said, 'For we too are his offspring.' Since we are God's offspring, we ought not to think that the deity is like gold, or silver, or stone, an image formed by the art and imagination of mortals. While God has overlooked the times of human ignorance, now he commands all people everywhere to repent, because he has fixed a day on which he will have the world judged in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed, and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead."

Psalm 66:8-20

Even in our times of trial, God has not forgotten us; He hears our prayers, and His steadfast love remains with us.

Bless our God, O peoples, let the sound of his praise be heard,
who has kept us among the living, and has not let our feet slip.
For you, O God, have tested us; you have tried us as silver is tried.
You brought us into the net; you laid burdens on our backs;
you let people ride over our heads; we went through fire and through water;
yet you have brought us out to a spacious place. I will come into your house with burnt-offerings.
Bless our God, O peoples; let the sound of his praise be heard!

I will pay you my vows, those that my lips uttered and my mouth promised when I was in trouble.
I will offer to you burnt-offerings of fatlings, with the smoke of the sacrifice of rams;
I will make an offering of bulls and goats.
Come and hear, all you who fear God, and I will tell what he has done for me.
Bless our God, O peoples; let the sound of his praise be heard!

I cried aloud to him, and he was extolled with my tongue.
If I had cherished iniquity in my heart, the Lord would not have listened.
But truly God has listened; he has given heed to the words of my prayer.
Blessed be God, because he has not rejected my prayer or removed his steadfast love from me.
Bless our God, O peoples; let the sound of his praise be heard!

Second Lesson: 1 Peter 3:13-22

Peter instructs that as followers of Christ, we are called to do good; even if we suffer for doing what is right, we will be blessed by God.

Now who will harm you if you are eager to do what is good? But even if you do suffer for doing what is right, you are blessed. Do not fear what they fear, and do not be intimidated, but in your hearts sanctify Christ as Lord. Always be ready to make your defense to anyone who demands from you an account of the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and reverence. Keep your conscience clear, so that, when you are maligned, those who abuse you for your good conduct in Christ may be put to shame. For it is better to suffer for doing good, if suffering should be God's will, than to suffer for doing evil. For Christ also suffered for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, in order to bring you to God. He was put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit, in which also he went and made a proclamation to the spirits in prison, who in former times did not obey, when God waited patiently in the days of Noah, during the building of the ark, in which a few, that is, eight people, were saved through water. And baptism, which this prefigured, now saves you—not as a removal of dirt from the body, but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers made subject to him.

Gospel Lesson: John 14:15-21

Jesus asks his followers to keep his commandments; those who do will be loved by God, and will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

“If you love me, you will keep my commandments. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you for ever. This is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, because he abides with you, and he will be in you. I will not leave you orphaned; I am coming to you. In a little while the world will no longer see me, but you will see me; because I live, you also will live. On that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you. They who have my commandments and keep them are those who love me; and those who love me will be loved by my Father, and I will love them and reveal myself to them.”

L: The Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.

P: Thanks be to God!

Homily

The Apostles' Creed

I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth.

I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord. He was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary. He suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried. He descended into hell. On the third day he rose again, and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the dead, and the life everlasting. Amen.

Hymn

Prayers of the People

The following prayers are suggested for use. These may be adapted, and others may be added.

Loving God, Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Prince of Peace, we bow before you this morning with heavy hearts. The world that we know is not at peace. Wars and conflicts rage—between nations, across communities, within families, inside our own hearts. Heal our world, Lord God. Heal us. Grant us peace. Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

Today we offer a special prayer for peace in Palestine and Israel. We pray for those innocent Palestinians who suffer from occupation and oppression, that they may be comforted and liberated. We pray for those in Israel who establish such unjust policies, that they may see and repent for the evil that they do. We pray for those in Palestine and Israel who peacefully resist these injustices, that they may receive your courage. Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

We pray for all victims of violence, in Palestine, in Israel, and in all countries and all places where a child of God takes up arms against another. Bless those in power with the wisdom to see the path of peace, and the courage to bring conflict and suffering to an end. Heal the wounds of the injured. Comfort the souls of those who mourn. Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

As we pray for others, we pray also for ourselves. You know, Lord God, the burdens we carry—our expectations, our fears, our grievances—that rob us of your peace. We ask you to strip away these burdens. Fill us with love for our enemy, compassion for the suffering, charity towards those in need. Remold us in your image, so that we might have the strength and courage to live out the gospel of your Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, who died on the cross so that we might live in peace. Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

Let us now draw our prayers to a close by saying together the prayer written for our use this day by the heads of the Christian Churches in Jerusalem:

Almighty and Merciful God, by the gift of the Holy Spirit, you gathered the first Christians in Jerusalem. Grant that, like the first church of Jerusalem, we may come together, and with courage, we may preach and live the Word, and the good news of truth, reconciliation, and peace.

God Creator, Giver of Life, Bearer of Pain, Initiator of Love, you made the world and everything in it. You created the human race in your image and likeness, and gave us the earth for all to share. Break down the walls that separate us.

God of Justice, your generosity is without bounds. Guard us from selfishness; inspire us to be instruments of love, and witnesses of your mercy and justice. Help us to face challenges and to struggle against all that is born of injustice. Lead us to act together in places and situations of want and need: where families are driven from their homes, where the vulnerable suffer in the hands of the powerful, where poverty and unemployment destroy lives.

God of Hope, you continue to call us to work for Peace in our world, broken and wounded by injustice, violence, and indifference. Alone, we are overwhelmed by challenges but together, and inspired by your Spirit, we can prevail beyond dreams and imagination. In fear we lose hope, and feel the futility of our efforts. Instill in our hearts and minds the image of your suffering and compassionate love as a source of courage and strength.

God, Protector of the widow, the orphan and the stranger, in a world where many know despair, you raised your Son Jesus Christ to give hope for humanity and renewal to the earth. Strengthen and unify your Church against the forces of evil in this part of the world, where aggression of all forms, killings and the blood of martyrs shed even in places of worship, obscure the hope of a new life.

God of Peace and Mercy, inspire nations to transform oppression and violence into freedom and peace for the sake of the poor, the vulnerable and the broken-hearted. Help us to respect and promote the equality and dignity of all, particularly in your Holy Land. Grant discernment to leaders and legislators, that righteousness and truth may flourish among all peoples throughout the world.

God our Father, we thank you for your Son, Jesus Christ, who taught us to yearn through prayer for the coming of your Kingdom. You are able to accept in us what we cannot acknowledge; to name in us what we cannot bear to speak of; to hold in your memory what we tried to forget. Teach us to pray together to resist the evil and oppression by our non-violent actions and love for one another. May your Son's earthly life be the model for our own, as we recognize your presence and guidance through all our joys and tribulations.

We pray these in the name of the Risen Lord, and in the power of His Spirit. Amen.

The Litany of Peace

Blessed are the peacemakers, who say no to war as a means to peace.
Blessed are the peacemakers, who are committed to disarm weapons of mass destruction.
Blessed are the peacemakers, who wage peace at heroic personal cost.
Blessed are the peacemakers, who challenge and confront judges, courts and prisons.
Blessed are the peacemakers, who help those who are hurting.
Blessed are the peacemakers, who befriend perfect strangers.
Blessed are the peacemakers, who open doors for acting justly, loving tenderly and walking humbly with God and all people of good will.
Blessed are the peacemakers, who welcome, encourage and inspire.
Blessed are the peacemakers, who offer hope and healing.
Blessed are the peacemakers, who care and comfort.
Blessed are the peacemakers, who help find answers.

The Sharing of the Peace

L: The peace of the Lord be with you.
P: And also with you!

THANKSGIVING

The Lord's Prayer

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours, now and forever. Amen.

SENDING FORTH

Hymn

Benediction

Easter Response

L: Go in peace to love and serve the risen Lord.
P: Thanks be to God!

World Week for Peace in Palestine Israel, an initiative of the Palestine Israel Ecumenical Forum (PIEF) of the World Council of Churches, is taking place from 29 May to 4 June 2011. The aim of World Week for Peace in Palestine Israel is to encourage congregations, communities, and individuals to make a common witness by participating in worship services, educational events, and acts of advocacy in support of a just peace for Palestinians and Israelis.

This week, in more than 20 countries on six continents, a wide diversity of religious communities, human rights and peace organizations, and people of faith are taking part in events to commemorate World Week for Peace in Palestine Israel.

The World Council of Churches invites member churches, religious and community organizations, and all people of faith to join with peacemakers in the region and around the world by participating in the events of World Week for Peace in Palestine Israel.

For more information on World Week for Peace in Palestine Israel, and to view a list of events taking place by country, please visit the initiative's website at www.worldweekforpeace.org.

+

