Sermon for Remembrance Day
Working for Peace

O God, lead us from death to life, from falsehood to truth, lead us from despair to hope, from fear to trust, lead us from hate to love, from war to peace. Let your peace fill our hearts, our world, our universe. Amen

Thank you, Jaclyn, for reading today's scriptures for our edification and inspiration

Let us reflect on them. For the last few weeks the Hebrew Scripture reading has been from the prophets and they have drawn a grim picture of death and destruction as the city of Jerusalem was leveled by the armies of surrounding empires, its population has largely been starved and grusomely slain, and its leading citizens exiled. In the choral offering we will soon hear we will hear the line, "as Rachel wept for children she could no longer hold", an echo of the cry of the people burying their slain dead, and a few weeks ago our responsive Psalm was "By the Rivers of Babylon, we wept", the cry of the exiles. They bring up the grief and trauma of war which we are raising up today in remembrance, wars past and wars present

In today's passage we hear of the issue of rebuilding after the war is finished (a dilemma facing the whole world now as we think and grieve over Ukraine and Gaza – how will rebuilding take place), but Haggai makes promises to the people that in the days to come, prosperity and peace will be theirs.

In the second lesson, the letter to the church at Thessalonika, Paul points to brutal leaders, referring in particular to the Roman emperor Caligula who in AD 39 ordered a large bronze statue of himself placed in the Temple in Jerusalem a major, a major sacrilege for the people. (Of course, Caligula, calling himself a god, was purposely posing a challenge for the Jews who said God alone was one and others , like the Roman emperor, will not be worshipped.)

Leaders like this will arise, says Paul, but he calls on the people of God to be bold in the strength of God, to stand firm, with unfailing courage, with firm hope and faith. We continue to see leaders of the nations who act in such inhumane ways and bring despair to people. So those very calls for courage, hope, and standing firm are <u>still</u> what we call called to in the name of the Prince of Peace, in the name of the Creator, who loves all his children.

Finally, in the Gospel Luke is talking about being gathered into God, gathered into the source of all being, that when we are gathered into God in death, we do not live any more by the world's understanding, not as to whom you are supposed to be married, not as to who is your enemy. As you were invited to read in the meditation before the service, when we think of the war dead, let us not think of them as simply dead, pathetically dead, sacrificed to the interests of various governments and powers. Let us see them instead transformed, existing in a place of peace, living in the arms of Life and Love, living in the arms of the source of Creation.

I invite you to focus for a moment on the picture on the screen. It is a call to Armistice, to laying down arms and bringing a cessation,, an end to war. It shows Blue Scarves and White Poppies in a display presented by the organization called World Beyond War. The blue scarves indicate a desire to live together in peace with all people and creatures under God's same blue sky which covers us all. The white poppies symbolize remembrance for all victims of war, both civilians and soldiers, and a commitment to peace making. The organization questions the glorification of war and advocates for non-violent solutions to conflict.

Red poppies, of course, are inspired by the poppies growing in the war-torn fields of Flanders, the first plants to spring up in those devastated battle fields. The red poppy was adopted in 1921 as a symbol of a commitment to remember.

The first white poppies were sold by an anti-war organization in UK in 1933, but their wearing was not common until the 2010s. The purple poppy also originated in the UK, in 2006, in honour of the animals that served and died in wars – horses, dogs, pigeons. In 2010, a black poppy was created to remember the Black, African and Caribbean soldiers and units that fought.

Nov. 11, 2025 is Remembrance/Armistice Day 108! As we all know, at the 11th hour of the 11th day of the 11th month in 1918, the guns of the First World War on the western front, which was Europe, fell silent.

Eddie Rickenbaker, the American flying ace who took off in an unauthorized flight just before 11 to observe what was going to take place. He wrote in his diary:

> I glanced at my watch. One minute to 11:00, thirty seconds, fifteen. And then it was 11:00 a.m. the eleventh hour of the eleventh day of the eleventh month. I was the only audience for the greatest show ever presented. On both sides of no-man's land, the trenches erupted. Brown-uniformed men poured out of the American trenches, gray-green uniforms out of the German. From my observer's seat overhead, I watched them throw their helmets in the air, discard their guns, wave their hands. Then all up and down the front, the two groups of men began edging toward each other across no-man's-land. Seconds before they had been willing to shoot each other; now they came forward. Hesitantly at first, then more quickly, each group approached the other.
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> Suddenly gray uniforms mixed with brown. I could see them hugging each other, dancing, jumping. Americans were passing out cigarettes and chocolate. I flew up to the French sector. There it was even more incredible. After four years of slaughter and hatred, they were not only hugging each other but kissing each other on both cheeks as well.
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> Star shells, rockets and flares began to go up, and I turned my ship toward the field. The war was over.

The formal armistice agreement had been signed at 5:12 in the morning between the Allied command and the German command on Nov. 11, but it built in a six-hour delay before it took effect. This delay was to ensure that orders and news could reach troops along the entire 450-mile Western Front, allowing for a simultaneous ceasefire. Communication methods at the time were limited to field telephones, telegraphs, and dispatch riders, making a delay essential to prevent a chaotic and staggered end to the fighting that could leave some units vulnerable. While the primary reasons were practical, the symbolic timing of the "eleventh hour of the eleventh day of the eleventh month" may have influenced the chosen time after calculating the necessary delay, while others, however, put a much more cynical emphasis on it, noting that some leaders wanted a bit more battlefield won, or a bit more glory.

Tragically, despite the impending ceasefire, approximately 2,700 men died on the front during those final six hours. The last soldier generally recognized to be killed in action was American Henry

Gunther, who died a minute before 11:00 a.m.., (one of the cynics has said, “that death was ‘for no reason’ - except that would imply the rest of the war was for some reason)

The United Church, while never a pacifist denomination like the Mennonites and the Hutterites, has historically supported the right to conscientious objection to war. During both world wars, the denomination was internally divided on the issue of participating in the war, and there were prominent pacifist ministers advocating for peace. Again, there are many who feel our world is being drawn into militarism and the industrial/military complex is leading us to where we might not want to go. The world is complicated for sure.

So let us pray and work strongly that war will end, there will be no more young men and women drawn into fighting, there will be no more grief or crying or pain, no more wanton destruction of homes and villages, families and farmlands. The Christmas angels said, “Peace on earth, good will to all people” The epistle says, “if it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.” (Romans 12:18), and our Saviour has said, “Blessed are the peacemakers for they shall be called children of God” (Matt 5:9), and “Peace I leave with you, my peace I give you. I do not give it as the world gives. Let not your hearts be troubled, do not be afraid.”

Let us take up the torch to seek and work for peace.

Let us pray:
O God of many names. Lover of all nations, we pray for peace in our hearts, in our homes, in our nations and in our world. For the peace you willed, we pray. Amen