Christian Homiletic and Liturgical Material
on the theme of

Holocaust Memorial Day 2015
for
Sunday 25 January or
Sunday 1 February

In appreciation to the Conference on Jewish Material Claims Against Germany (Claims Conference) for supporting this educator training programme. Through recovering the assets of the victims of the Holocaust, the Claims Conference enables organisations around the world to provide education about the Shoah and to preserve the memory of those who perished.
Holocaust Memorial Day

takes place on 27 January each year. It’s a time for everyone to pause to remember the millions of people who have been murdered or whose lives have been changed beyond recognition during the Holocaust, Nazi Persecution and in subsequent genocides in Cambodia, Rwanda, Bosnia and Darfur. On HMD we can honour the survivors of these regimes and challenge ourselves to use the lessons of their experience to inform our lives today.

HMD is a time when we seek to learn the lessons of the past and to recognise that genocide does not just take place on its own, it’s a steady process which can begin if discrimination, racism and hatred are not checked and prevented. We’re fortunate here in the UK; we are not at risk of genocide. However, discrimination has not ended, nor has the use of the language of hatred or exclusion. There is still much to do to create a safer future and HMD is an opportunity to start this process.

Given that 27 January 2015 marks not only the 70th anniversary of the liberation of the Auschwitz-Birkenau concentration and death camp, but also the 20th anniversary of the Genocide in Srebrenica, it is important that memory is at the heart of the 2015 commemoration.

See more at: www.hmd.org.uk

These resources are created jointly by the Council of Christians and Jews (CCJ) and Churches Together in Britain and Ireland (CTBI). They are intended to offer a range of materials in which we explore the theme of Keeping the Memory Alive, what remembrance is, how to deal with enmity and achieve true reconciliation, ecumenically, between Jews and Christians, and in wider interfaith relations.

See more at www.ccj.org.uk and www.ctbi.org.uk

Contents

Bible Notes for Sermons and Reflections pages 3 – 9

Prayers and Activities pages 10 - 13

We offer Bible notes on the readings (usually the gospel) which most Christian worship leaders will be likely to use on the Sunday either side of 27 January (there is a choice between the Revised Common Lectionary readings for Ordinary Time, the Festivals of the Conversion of St Paul and Candlemas, and the theme of this year’s Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, Jesus and the Samaritan woman).

The Prayers and Activities do not cover this range of themes, but focus more simply on the theme of Memory. Thus they are suitable for any service with an HMD 2015 emphasis.

1 The text to this point is from the HMD Trust, reproduced (adapted) with permission.
**Bible Notes**

Jesus and the Samaritan Woman (John 4.1-42)
(Week of Prayer for Christian Unity)

**Honestly Remembering Enmity**

It was necessary to walk through Samaria...
“How is it that you, a Jew, ask of me...
“Are you greater than our ancestor...?”
“You worship what you do not know, but we...”
They were astonished [thinking] “What do you want?”
“Why are you speaking with her?”

‘Jews do not share things in common with Samaritans.’ (John 4.9b).
‘You yourselves know that it is unlawful for a Jew to associate with or to visit a Gentile’ (Acts 10.28a).

One thing human beings do, time and again, is divide up humanity into them and us, a policy which needs, one way or another, careful policing.

As an aside, it is perhaps worth noting that there is nothing in Jewish Law (either the Torah of the Bible or the halakhah of the rabbis) which prevents a Jew from visiting gentiles. Again, the existence of the Court of the Gentiles in the Temple shows that gentiles were indeed fit to be
associated with. The idea of an outright ban seems to have been the perception of the gentiles (e.g. Tacitus).¹

Some divisions between human beings are neutral or even benign. Many people value gender difference. Football would be impossible without distinct teams, as would party politics. But dangerous things happen when difference moves over to separation, and then caricature and intolerance, and ultimately hatred. Actually, if we are honest, hatred or the possibility of reacting with hatred are seldom far from the surface.

How, then, to stop the ‘separate development’ which sets in motion this evil trajectory? Perhaps by nurturing our sense of fascination of the other. Christians (and Jews) may find this easier than some, if they remember that it is humankind in our diversity which is made in the image of God. Fascination can then of course involve common, civic gatherings, and visiting our different places of worship. But as important may be noting who is left out on these occasions, who is left in the kitchen or outside the gate.

John’s Gospel is often held up as an example of how to get it wrong. The opposition it sets up between its own community and ‘the Jews’ (hoi Ioudaioi) is painful and extreme. So it is worth stressing that in this passage (v. 22) we have from Jesus’ lips one unambiguously positive statement about the Jews: salvation comes from them! The Greek uses the present tense (estin). It is not just that there were some good Israelite characters before Jesus came along.

Why was it necessary for Jesus and disciples to walk through Samaria? Well, it is true that that is the direct route from Judea to Galilee (John 4.3). But the Greek is strong: edei; ‘it behove them’, perhaps. So it is also possible that it was providential. After all, the Samaritan woman becomes a great – both fervent and successful – evangelist, bringing people to Christ (well, on this occasion, literally bringing Christ to the people!). In other words, she acted after the manner of Philip and Andrew (see the Revised Common Lectionary gospel for the day).

**Call of Philip and Andrew (John 1.43-51)**
(25 January – Third Sunday of Ordinary Time)

*Jews and Christians: Remembering the Future!*

‘Can anything good come out of Nazareth?’
‘Here is truly an Israelite, in whom there is no deceit.’

Whole sermons and talks could usefully be devoted to unpacking these (and other) statements from today’s gospel. But there also has to be merit in thinking about the emerging theme as a whole. When Nathanael says: ‘You are the Son of God, you are the King of Israel!’ he is of course declaring that Jesus – even though he comes from modest Nazareth and not from a city of Judah – is the ‘Messiah’, the Christ/Mashiach.

¹ See The Jewish Annotated New Testament ad loc.
Of course, the belief that Jesus has this role and title has separated Jesus’ followers from Jews who follow Judaism as we know it, from early days. It surely helped bring about the parting of the ways, which means that we now think of ‘Judaism’ and ‘Christianity’ as two distinct faiths. Modern scholars tend to think that the final separation happened much later than was earlier thought. Well into the fourth century, at least some Christians thought it natural to celebrate Jewish festivals in synagogue. But happen it did.

There is another side to this, however. It is that Jews and Christians still share a common hope in a messianic age, where peace with justice with forgiveness with freedom - with flourishing and joyful feasting - reign, are evident, abound. This is no small hope. In truth, throughout history it has had the quality of ‘hope against hope’.

This hope cannot be kept alive by meticulous examination of events in the world; that would rather encourage a tendency to despair, or at least thoroughgoing agnosticism. It is rather restored and refreshed by the fact that in our respective worship we enter into an overarching story of ‘salvation’ or ‘redemption’.

Jews and Christians agree that in liturgy we step outside of time, or that all time is ‘concertina-ed’. Past, present and future in one. When we remember the truly formative moments (Exodus for Jews, Easter for Christians), we are, as it were ‘remembering the future’. The past act is the promise of future consummation.

This notion, in the abstract, is not going to convince anyone that we, between us, have stories of radical hope. But we hope(!) to draw people in to the experience of the whole liturgical year. Each year the same. Each year different, for we are different, having changed. By living it, and re-living it, we find it makes more sense than any rather naïve idea of linear human progress.


Remembering Painful Jewish-Christian Relations

Jesus was a good Jew, loyal to Torah and his People; it was Paul, with his ridiculous contrasts of Law v Grace etc. who really poisoned Christianity against Judaism.

---

1 Ironically, it is reflection on the Adversus Iudaeos (‘Against the Jews’) literature which has brought this to light. St John Chrysostom’s ‘Against the Jews’ sermons of 386/7 are replete with demands that his congregation stop visiting synagogues for the festivals – thus demonstrating that at least some of them did, and on religious grounds. See John Chrysostom, Discourses against Judaizing Christians, translated by Paul W. Harkins. The Fathers of the Church; v. 68 (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 1979).
Not as such a direct quotation from any one source, but a ‘trope’ - a statement standing for a whole school of thought, a school inhabited by Jews and Christians (and would-be ‘neutral’ scholars) alike. If we had to choose one event recorded in the New Testament which has had a disastrous Nachleben (after-life) for Jewish-Christian relations... well, we should probably still have to start with the Passion narratives. But the conversion of St Paul might well follow on.

The story is dramatic, and might be called a ‘conversion’ experience in the sense of an event which turned Paul right around, such that his life would never be the same again. But the title has traditionally been taken to mean more than ‘a revolutionary moment’. Rather, it has been understood as the incident which made Paul cease to be a Jew, and ‘turned him Christian’.

Thoughtful readers have always recognised that this is an anachronism, that no phenomenon, ‘Christianity’, separate to and rivalling a singular ‘Judaism’, existed in these days. Remember that we are talking about the 30s CE (according to Luke any way), long before Paul’s own letters, let alone the gospels.

Moreover, we now have at least one generation of scholarship which has insisted the account has about it so many of the characteristics of the commissioning of a prophet (or similar), or a meeting with the Divine for a specific purpose within the story of the People of Israel, as set out in the Hebrew Scriptures and Apocrypha. The Jewish Annotated Bible notes of verses 3-7:

Common elements of divine appearances include flashing light (4 Macc 4.10), falling to the Ground (Ezek 1.28; Dan 10.9), double naming (Gen 22.11; 46.2; Ex 3.4; 1 Sam 3.4, 10), and commission (Gen 12.1; 22.2).

And, most simply put, at no point is Paul asked to leave his Judaism behind; he merely comes to the conviction that his Judaism is enhanced by knowing and proclaiming Jesus as Lord (v 5) and Son of God (v 20).

Both in Acts and in history, Paul did not manage to win over his own People as a whole to this idea of the already-present reality of the messianic age in the risen Jesus. We know that this was a source of great pain for him. Romans 9.2-5:

I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my own people, my kindred according to the flesh. They are Israelites, and to them belong the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises, to them belong the patriarchs, and from them, according to the flesh, comes the Messiah...
How this state of affairs can be is something Paul wrestles with throughout Romans 9-11. Most commentators, which different degrees of bluntness, say that he fails to come up with a neat answer. Instead, he ends by staying within the mystery of the interrelationships of Christ, Church and Israel, and lands on the bedrock of praise. Romans 11.33: ‘O the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgements and how inscrutable his ways!'

We must remember the reality of Jewish-Christian relations over the centuries, and not least in the early centuries, when the charge of ‘deicide’ bedded down, blaming all Jews everywhere for Christ’s death. And much enmity has been caused by later people’s reading of Paul. That is not in doubt. Can any of the responsibility be laid at Paul’s door? However one answers that, we owe Paul a readiness to remember the complexity of his thought, and his character. It cannot be reduced to one monolithic ‘conversion’.

Healing Someone with an ‘Unclean Spirit’ (Mark 1.21-28)
(2 February – Fourth Sunday of Ordinary Time)

Remembering Those Not Healed

Whether or not one calls this period in the church calendar ‘the season of Ephiphany’, it is the time when readings focus on beginnings, on firsts. This is the first account of a miraculous healing/exorcism by Jesus in Mark’s gospel. It is a dramatic story, told dramatically. Mark gets two of his characteristic qualifiers ‘immediately’ - ‘euthus’ - into the story before the healing proper actually begins (vv. 21, 23)! The healing happens not exactly immediately, but the narrative flow is swift. This is typical of Jesus’ healings in the gospels (though, interestingly, it is also Mark, and Mark alone, who has a staggered, or two-staged healing – of a blind man – Mark 8.22-26).

These healings can stand as confirmation of Jesus’ messianic status, to those who already feel they have reason to affirm this. They could work as substantive proof of that status, only if his healings were of a different nature/order than others’ healings. Mark’s text doesn’t quite say that. It is Jesus’ teaching which has unique authority (exousia) (vv. 22, 27). The Annotated Jewish Bible adds:

> Although there has been a tendency in the modern period to distinguish Jesus’ healings from those of contemporary Jews and others, this is a theological not a historical judgement. The miracles in the Gospels contain the same procedures, healing formulae (e.g. ‘be muzzled,’ ‘rebuked’ v. 25, often retaining the original Aramaic, e.g. 7.34 ‘ephphatha’), and demonological lore as the magic of the ancient world.

In the yearly cycles of gospel readings, Christians have numberless chances to remember Jesus as healer, and give thanks – many also giving thanks for the rediscovery of the Christian healing ministry in recent decades.
However, we can also use this reading as a chance to remember the ‘hard cases’, the countless number of people who were not healed by Jesus in his day, and who were not healed, or saved, or rescued by the Divine (however named and understood) since then. HMD Trust reminds us that 27 January 2015 marks the 70th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz-Birkenau and 2015 is the 20th anniversary of the genocide in Srebrenica, Bosnia.¹ How many were not ‘saved’ or ‘healed’ but abandoned to their fate, to evil, to torture, to obliteration?

Again, how much solace can we/might we/should we draw from little healings and moments of consolation along the way? One example is also highlighted by the HMD Trust: David Berger, in his last letter before being murdered by Nazis in Vilnius, 1941:

> If something happens, I would want there to be somebody who would remember that someone named D Berger had once lived. This will make things easier for me in the difficult moments.²

For at least this hope, this suggestion of ‘ease’, was, among all the horror, realised.

**Candlemas (Luke 2.22-40) (2 February - Alternative)**

*Memories of Candlelit Joy and the Danger of the Flame*

The Feast of the Presentation of Christ in the Temple marks what it claims to mark. As Luke 2.22 has it: ‘When the time came for their purification according to the law of Moses, they brought him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord’. Actually, the commandments of Moses require only the ‘purification’ of the mother (Leviticus 12), and the term ‘purification’ is very likely to mislead. It does *not* mean she was ‘dirty’. It might mean more that she was unfit to take her place in the symbolic order of the Temple, centred on the *symbolising* of life, as she had been too closely bound up with life and death (and blood) *themselves*, *directly* in giving birth. That said, the Anglican Book of Common Prayer does get something right when it says that the day is ‘commonly called the Purification of Saint Mary the Virgin’.

However, to many if not most who mark this day, it is ‘Candlemas’ (or Candlemass!). Candles are not mentioned in the Lukan account, but candles have often been blessed and distributed on this day. It is also seen as the final departure of the extended Christmas-Epiphan season by some.

Whatever the rituals involved, it seems that candles are no less important, and no less attractive in the 21st century than earlier.

How much of how many lives are marked by candles? Think of those used in religious and communal ritual – in rites of passage. Not only Shabbat candles and Hanukkah lights for public display, not only baptismal or Advent candles, but also those on birthday cakes and those lit to

remember family members scattered abroad or serving in Armed Forces. All of these can provide reference points for a life, as we try to remember. The popularity of scented candles can add a whole new level to this, by virtue of the way the sense of smell interacts with the capacity to remember.

But there is also something irreducibly risky about candles. As any firefighter will tell you, a lit candle is a flame: it is, however contained, a fire. And it can make for fire. And the emergence of the Nazi genocide, and others too, would be unthinkable without the deliberate use of fire. Kristallnacht (9-10 November 1938) may be known as the night of broken glass, but it might as well be called the night of the burning synagogues – for over 1000 were burnt. It was a turning-point in the Nazi persecution of Germany and Austria’s own Jewish citizens.¹ Now, perhaps more than ever (as that generation passes), we have a chance to pray for those whose memories of flames are overwhelmingly traumatic, and not celebratory.

Gathering

God remembered Noah
and promises a covenant of beauty.
God remembered Abraham
and makes each of us a pilgrim.
God remembered Sarah
and will ever be the God of surprises.
God remembered Rachel
and draws us all to choose life.
God calls us to remember Jesus the Christ
in word,
in bread and wine,
in the secret place,
and here,
in this, our gathering.

Opening Prayer

God who knows us,
who never forgets us,
we thank you that, when you ‘remember’ us,
you gaze on us in a way
that makes new worlds possible.
Help us to remember
the horrors others have faced and face.
Help us to remember
the people we’d rather forget.
Help us to remember
the dark corners of our own lives,
for you transfigure everything,
bringing light and life.
Amen.

Confession, Absolution

Father, you fix your loving gaze on those in pain,
but we choose to forget,
stuck in comfort and habit.
Lord, have mercy.
Lord, have mercy.
Jesus, we take bread and wine
to remember your death,
then cowardly refuse to take the risks of love.
Christ, have mercy.
**Christ, have mercy.**

Spirit, you call us to futures
when all shall be well,
but we nurse resentments and conflicts long past.
Lord, have mercy.
**Lord, have mercy.**

May almighty God,
Father, Son and Holy Spirit,
the Eternal One,
see *your*/*our* timely repentance,
forgive *you*/*us*,
and free *you*/*us* to live your life.
**Amen.**

**Intercessions**

Eternal One, maker of the world and time,
**help us remember your call, here and now.**

*or*

God, we remember your love.
**May we show it and live it.**

Eternal God, bless your Church,
always at risk of forgetting its true vocation,
and turning inward in conflict and fear.
Guide all who guide us...
and the prophets you send
on and beyond the margins of the Church.

Eternal God, bless all people of faith.
May we remember that it is in our diversity
that we form your image in the world...
Purify all that is impure
among all who pray and seek your ways.

Eternal God, bless your world.
May we remember to live simply
that others may simply live,
and that we are stewards and not overlords
of your vulnerable and astounding creation...

Eternal God, bless all peacemakers
and challenge all war-makers by your love.
May we remember how violence can draw us all in
with its lie that it is a solution to everything.
May we never forget to pray
for those fighting for us,
and for our enemies...

Eternal God, bless this place you have called us to,
all who work, live, and come and go here...
all people of influence in this place,
and all we would rather forget, or do not see.

Eternal God, bless all those who long to forget
the traumas of war,
deadly poverty or displacement...
May we offer true hospitality of place and heart
to those who feel they must
forget the land of their birth
to seek asylum among us.

Eternal God, bless all who can no longer remember
the breadth and depth of their own lives,
as they live with forgetfulness, dementia,
or anything which dulls remembrance.
Be with those who care for them,
in all the frustrations and joys,
and with all who suffer...

Eternal God, bless all those charged
with helping younger generations
and those yet to come
to ‘remember’ the horrors of the Nazi terror
regime over 70 years ago
and all subsequent genocides,
by name that in Bosnia 20 years ago...
May humankind always look with truthfulness,
and tears of repentance,
at where our hates can lead us.
Eternal God, bless all those who are forgetting all that is petty, as they face the mystery and majesty of death. Be with all who will die today, especially those who will die tragically, in agony, or alone, [those who have died recently... and those who have shaped us, and have died... Draw further into your light those who have died with no one to remember them.]

Sending Out Prayer

God who is Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and who is One, be with you/us. God who is Eternal, and the maker of this world of time, be with you/us. God who never forgets us, and who bears with our forgetfulness, be with you/us. God, whose future breaks into our present, be with you/us, that you/we may live in God’s strength, joy and compassion, now and always. Amen.

Activity

Two activities around ‘remembering’ are possible.

1. Fill a table with everyday items, not just typical table-ware, but other more random items (an iron? socks? a book?). Invite people to inspect the table. Then (without warning may be best) cover the table with a large sheet and see how much people can remember. They may of course remember a great deal. In this case you can ask if they remember the layout of the table, or the colour of the various items. Notice whether or not people agree. This may uncover just how deceptive and unreliable our ‘personal memories’ may be. This should be a quick, fun exercise, not a ponderous scientific experiment.

2. Ask people to bring in one photograph which reminds them, if possible with special poignancy, about their past. Prime at least some people also to bring items which give off smells which remind them of their childhood and/or specific moments. Invite people to reflect on how important and powerful it can be to be called to remember a long-past incident or time. This is a more discursive exercise and time can be taken over it.

After either exercise (or both exercises), invite people to reflect on how people remember trauma – both how painful that must be, and how avoiding the issue, leading to repression, is even worse. Do not assume that this is only a theoretical issue for all your gathering. On the contrary, it is likely to be a ‘live’ one for some. Thus a long, structured meditation is probably not called for, rather just a relatively brief challenge to the imagination.

This may lead into an open discussion about how the community may help those seeking to remember and memorialise the Second World War, now that the generation of survivors is passing. What are the dangers of living in a world where no one can say: ‘I was there.’ ‘I saw it.’? Especially if you have a sense that the discussion of the remembering of trauma has caused any degree of discomfort and distress, you may use this from the closing liturgy of the Anglican Church of Kenya:
THE BLESSING

The people accompany their first three responses with a sweep of the arm towards the cross, and their final response with a sweep towards heaven.

All our problems
we send to the cross of Christ.

All our difficulties
We send to the cross of Christ.

All the devil’s works
we send to the cross of Christ.

All our hopes
we set on the risen Christ.

Christ the Sun of Righteousness
shine upon you/us and scatter the darkness
from before your/our path:
and the blessing of God almighty,
Father, Son and Holy Spirit, be among you/us,
and remain with you/us, always.

Amen.¹

¹ © 1989 Church of the Province of Kenya. This blessing is offered as one possible way in which people in need of some act of ‘moving on’ from the difficult memories raised can do so by doing something. No particular theology of the cross and resurrection is intended. There is no suggestion that it is sufficient as a theological reflection of the same. On the other hand, it is also to be recognised as an important part of the liturgical witness of the Church of the Province of Kenya.