

Readings and Prayers to Commemorate the Battle of The Somme, 1st July 1916

A Service Outline

The Battle of the Somme has been described as the most devastating battle in modern military history. The Fourth Army, the first to be deployed, was largely made up of units from the north of England (where, of course, the majority of the munitions factories were located) as well as those from Scotland and Ireland. Nearly half of those first deployed on the Somme were support personnel, medical, catering, and logistics staff.

An Introduction or Bidding Prayer

We gather today with the jarring images of the waste and ruin of war imprinted on our minds and imaginations, to remember all those who were involved in the Battle of the Somme. We honour the memory of those who inhabited that war-shattered landscape, those who endured the mud and the blood; those who showed great courage and loyalty to comrades at arms; those who saw the unspeakable sight of bodies broken; those whose minds were numbed by the noise of bombardment, and those whose eyes saw the ugliness of disfigured, weeping and frightened faces. For all who were engaged in combat, those who tended the maimed and injured, the fallen, and for those families who still hold the memories of deceased soldiers, we ask for God’s mercy, and for ourselves, the grace to remember.

All We will remember.

A Psalm of Lament

Psalm 88

1 O Lord, God of my salvation, •

I have cried day and night before you.

2 Let my prayer come into your presence; •

incline your ear to my cry.

3 For my soul is full of troubles; •

my life draws near to the land of death.

4 I am counted as one gone down to the Pit; •

I am like one that has no strength,

5 Lost among the dead, •

like the slain who lie in the grave,

6 Whom you remember no more, •

for they are cut off from your hand.

7 You have laid me in the lowest pit, •

in a place of darkness in the abyss.

8 Your anger lies heavy upon me, •

and you have afflicted me with all your waves.

9 You have put my friends far from me •

and made me to be abhorred by them.

10 I am so fast in prison that I cannot get free; •

my eyes fail from all my trouble.

11 Lord, I have called daily upon you; •

I have stretched out my hands to you.

12 Do you work wonders for the dead? •

Will the shades stand up and praise you?

13 Shall your loving-kindness be declared in the grave, •

your faithfulness in the land of destruction?

14 Shall your wonders be known in the dark •

or your righteous deeds in the land where all is forgotten?

15 But as for me, O Lord, I will cry to you; •

early in the morning my prayer shall come before you.

16 Lord, why have you rejected my soul? •

Why have you hidden your face from me?

17 I have been wretched and at the point of death from my youth; •

I suffer your terrors and am no more seen.

18 Your wrath sweeps over me; •

your horrors are come to destroy me;

19 All day long they come about me like water; •

they close me in on every side.

20 Lover and friend have you put far from me •

and hid my companions out of my sight.

All Glory to the Father and to the Son

and to the Holy Spirit;

as it was in the beginning is now

and shall be for ever. Amen.

Collect

O God our light and our defence,

breathe your gentle Spirit over the wastes of our world.

Protect our memories from the infection of hate,

that we may live free from fear and resentment.

May the light of Christ lead us

out of the valley of the shadow of death

onto paths of reconciliation, forgiveness and peace

for the sake of the world your Son came to save.

All Amen.

Hymn

‘Rock of ages, cleft for me’ or *some other suitable hymn*.

Readings

One or more of these readings may be used

1 Samuel 17.4-11, 19-23, 41-50;

2 Samuel 18.24 – end;

Daniel 2.31-33;

Mark 16.33-38;

1 Corinthians 15.25-28;

Ephesians 6.10-20;

Revelation 12.7-12

Canticle

A Song of Jonah

Refrain: **My prayer came to you in your holy temple,**

and you brought up my life from the depths.

I called to you, O God, out of my distress and you answered me;

out of the deep caverns of death I cried, and you heard my voice.

All You cast me into the deep, into the heart of the seas,

and the flood surrounded me,

all your waves and billows passed over me.

Then I said, I am driven away from your sight;

how shall I ever look again upon your holy temple?

All The waters closed in over me,

the deep was round about me;

weeds were wrapped around my head

at the roots of the mountains.

I went down to the land whose bars closed upon me for ever,

yet you brought up my life from the depths, O God.

All As my life was ebbing away, I remembered you, O God,

and my prayer came to you, into your holy temple.

With the voice of thanksgiving, I will sacrifice to you;

what I have vowed I will pay; deliverance belongs to the Lord!

Jonah 2.2-7,9

Glory to the Father and to the Son

and to the Holy Spirit;

as it was in the beginning is now

and shall be for ever. Amen.

Refrain: **My prayer came to you in your holy temple,**

and you brought up my life from the depths.

Non Biblical Readings

Anthologies

Catherine Reilly (ed) *Scars Upon My Heart: Women’s Poetry and Verse of the First World War* (Virago, 2006)

Matthew George Walter (ed.) *The Penguin Book of First World War Poetry* (Penguin 2006)

Long Poems

David Jones *In Parenthesis* (1937) (Faber 1975)

Fiction

Richard Aldington *Death of a Hero* (Penguin Classics 2013)

Henri Barbusse *Under Fire* (BBBX Books 2010)

Pat Barker *Regeneration* (Penguin 2008)

Pat Barker *The Eye in the Door* (Penguin 2008)

Pat Barker *The Ghost Road* (Penguin 2008)

Sebastian Faulks *Birdsong* (Vintage 2014)

Susan Hill *Strange Meeting* (Penguin 1973)

Frederic Manning *The Middle Parts of Fortune: Somme and Ancre 1916* (Penguin 2014)

R.G. Sherriff *Journey’s End* (Penguin Classics 2000)

Oral History (Imperial War Museum)

Max Arthur *Forgotten Voices of the Great War* (Ebury Press 2003)

Joshua Levine *Forgotten Voices of the Somme* (Ebury Press 2009)

Also available in audio formats

Responsory

The Lord brought me out of the roaring pit, out of the mire and clay,

All He set my feet upon a rock and made my footing secure.

Do not withhold your compassion, O lord,

All Set my feet upon a rock and make my footing secure.

Glory to the Father and to the Son

and to the Holy Spirit.

All Bring me out of the roaring pit, out of the mire and clay,

and make my footing secure.

Prayers

Prayer of Confession

Lord, the nations are in uproar and the kingdoms are shaken.

Lord, have mercy.

All Lord, have mercy.

Lord, bring comfort to those who mourn and have suffered loss.

Christ, have mercy.

All Christ, have mercy.

Lord, speak your word of peace and calm our fears.

Lord, have mercy.

All Lord, have mercy.

Lord, God of the nations, we easily forget those who are the victims of war. Forgive the wrath of the nations, the desire to build empires and to seek domination over others. May your mercy be upon all who have suffered the ravages of war; soothe their sorrows and heal their memories. Restrain the impulse to seek revenge, and by your grace may we find forgiveness in our hearts. Strengthen our wills to do good and not harm, to care and not to destroy, and bring good out of evil. We make this prayer in the name of the one who endured the cross and was victorious over

sin and death, Jesus Christ, our Lord.

All Amen.

Prayer of Commemoration

Eternal God, our refuge and strength,

on this day we remember before you

all who experienced the battle on the Somme:

those who faced the terrible waste and devastation,

who fought against all the odds, endured the clinging mud,

and the squalor of the trenches.

We recall with thanksgiving the loyalty shown to comrades and

the bravery of those who overcame their fear,

the courage of those who daily faced the pounding of artillery,

gun-fire and shrapnel.

May we never forget the devastating loss of this battle,

the anxiety on the home-front,

and the sacrifices that were made.

Through our remembrances today, strengthen our resolve

to oppose naked aggression, to defend the weak,

and to speak your word of peace in times of conflict and insecurity.

This we ask in the name of the Prince of peace,

our Saviour, Jesus Christ.

All Amen.

Other Prayers

Lord of the Nations,

giver of joy in every generation,

companion in sorrow even when grief veils your presence:

[we thank you for the meeting of nations

in peace and reconciliation here today.]

Accept our sorrow for those who fell in battle on the Somme,

our gratitude for the freedom won by their sacrifice,

our pain for the conflicts that still engulf the world,

and our hope that we, with all who gave their lives,

might journey to you into your safe keeping,

and enjoy your gift of eternal peace in Jesus Christ our Lord.

All Amen.

Inspired by lines from the fragmentary Anglo-Saxon poem, The Battle of Maldon, which records the 10th-century battle at Maldon in Essex which saw Saxon and Viking soldiers dying in great numbers.

Faithful God,

you hear those who call on you in trust and comfort those who mourn:

hear us as we remember those who fell in the roar of battle

and died in the mire and clay of the trenches;

hear us as we remember those who survived the battle

but returned wounded in mind and body;

hear us as we remember those who mourned the dead

and the loss of homes and communities.

May the nations united today in sorrow

find a single voice to sing a new song of peace, hope and freedom

for the sake of your world and the advancement of your kingdom

in Jesus Christ our Lord.

All Amen.

Based on Psalm 40.1-3

A prayer or prayers of those local Regiments engaged in the Battle of the Somme may be said here.

A Prayer for our world today

Lord God, our king and our judge,

we fail to seek your justice,

and swerve from the way of your righteousness:

look with compassion on those who face danger, disaster

and devastation.

Guide us all along the path of life, and make us valiant for truth,

through Jesus Christ, the prince of peace.

All Amen.

Let us gather up these and all our prayers in the words that Jesus taught us:

All Our Father, who art in heaven,

hallowed be thy name;

thy kingdom come;

thy will be done;

on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread.

And forgive us our trespasses

as we forgive those who trespass against us.

And lead us not into temptation;

but deliver us from evil.

For thine is the kingdom,

the power and the glory,

for ever and ever.

Amen.

Hymn

'Jesu lover of my soul.' or *some other suitable hymn*.

Final Prayer and Blessing

Bring us, O Lord God at our last awakening,

into the house and gate of heaven:

to enter into that gate, and dwell in that house,

where there shall be no darkness nor dazzling, but one equal light;

no noise nor silence, but one equal music;

no fears nor hopes, but one equal possession;

no foes nor friends, but one equal communion,

in one equal eternity,

in the habitation of your glory.

All Amen.

(words from John Donne)

May God the Holy Trinity

guard and defend you on every side,

sustain you in times of difficulty,

and strengthen you in faith and hope;

and the blessing of God almighty,

the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit

be with you and all whom you love,

now and always.

All Amen.

Prayer to be used by the Archbishop of Canterbury During the National Commemorative Event to Mark the Centenary of the Battle of the Somme Thiepval Memorial, 1 July 2016

Eternal God, our refuge and strength,

on this day we remember before you

all who experienced the battle on the Somme:

those who faced the terrible waste and devastation,

who fought against all the odds, endured the clinging mud,

and the squalor of the trenches.

We recall with thanksgiving the loyalty shown to comrades and

the bravery of those who overcame their fear,

the courage of those who daily faced the pounding of artillery,

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the anxiety on the home-front,

and the sacrifices that were made.

Through our remembrances today, strengthen our resolve

to oppose naked aggression, to defend the weak,

and to speak your word of peace in times of conflict and insecurity.

This we ask in the name of the Prince of peace,

our Saviour, Jesus Christ. **Amen.**

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