

Christian Worship Resources for the Children's Sabbath



Worship is at the heart of most Children's Sabbaths. It is in worship that we praise God who has blessed us with children and charged us with their care. It is in worship that we hear again the prophets and their warnings against injustice and their call to justice. It is in worship that we renew our commitment to follow Jesus who said to welcome the children because in doing so we welcome him and not just him but the one who sent him. As we go forth from worship in the power of the Holy Spirit, may we continue to praise God with our work to nurture and protect all children.

This section provides worship resources for Christian congregations. It includes:

- Suggestions for the worship service, including ways to involve children and youths;
- Sample Children's Sabbath liturgies for Roman Catholic parishes, Episcopal parishes, and Protestant churches to use or adapt to be appropriate for your particular congregation;

- Additional prayers and readings;
- Sermon notes on the Revised Common Lectionary (the cycle of designated readings for many Protestant denominations), the Episcopal Lectionary, the Lutheran Lectionary, and the Roman Catholic Lectionary;
- Sermon notes on Micah 4:1-5 for churches that don't follow the Lectionary; and
- A sample Children's Sermon.

A seven-day devotional guide which may be photocopied and distributed to congregation members the Sunday preceding the Children's Sabbath to help them prepare, in prayer and reflection, for the special occasion is available for download at www.childrensdefense.org/childrenssabbaths.

Worship Suggestions

- **Use the bulletin inserts** in the Promoting Your Children's Sabbath Section available for download at www.childrensdefense.org/childrenssabbaths.
- **Use or adapt one of the sample worship services** provided in this section.
- **Create your own materials on the theme** of children, justice, and God's call to end the violence of weapons and poverty and seek peace and economic security.
- **Use readings from worship and prayer books** that include a social action theme.
- **Incorporate resources from your denomination that focus on children and child advocacy.** For example, the Presbyterian Church (USA) has a Vision Statement on ministry to children, The Episcopal Church has an Episcopal Charter for Children, The United Methodist Church uses The Bishops' Initiative on Children and Poverty, and the Roman Catholic Church has the Bishops' statement Putting Children and Families First: A Challenge for our Church, Nation and World. These could be used in place of a more traditional affirmation of faith, as an act of commitment, or incorporated in another part of the service.
- **Select hymns and anthems that focus on children and our responsibilities to them.** (The sample worship services include music suggestions and a list of other music is on pages 27-28.)
- **Focus the sermon or homily on children and our responsibility to act on their behalf.** If appropriate, draw on the Sermon Notes on texts designated in the Revised Common Lectionary, Roman Catholic Lectionary, Lutheran Lectionary and Episcopal Lectionary for October 20, 2013 (the Gospel and Epistle readings coincide in all four lectionaries; the Old Testament lessons and Psalms differ).
- **Use or adapt the suggested Children's Sermon in this section.** Or, in a role reversal, have one of the children give an "Adult's Sermon"—a sermon from a child addressed to adults.
- **Include a commissioning service for educators or others who "minister" (in the broadest sense) to children.** Following the sermon, these professionals or volunteers (contacted in advance) may be invited to come forward for a brief service that recognizes their work as a form of ministry, with prayers for God's guidance in their work, and prayers for the children whom they serve.
- **Commission staff and board members of child-serving programs** affiliated with the congregation, and celebrate their work as part of the congregation's mission.
- **Include prayers for children who are in need.** Specifically name problems afflicting children in your community, as well as crises affecting children across our nation and throughout our world.
- **Invite a speaker from a program serving children** to deliver a "minute for mission" during your announcement time or to speak at another point in the service. Encourage the speaker to highlight opportunities for members to become involved themselves and to speak out for children.
- **Collect a special offering to benefit a program serving children or families,** such as an after-school program, mentoring and tutoring program, community health clinic, or Head Start program. Announce the offering in advance so that members will be prepared. Dedicate the offering during the service. The offering could be in the form of money or items such as children's books, diapers, or other needed items.

- **Invite on-site child care staff, administrators, parents, and children to attend your Children's Sabbath**, or invite the children, parents, staff, and administration from neighborhood schools.

Involve Children and Youths.

The Children's Sabbath, unlike a traditional Youth Sunday or Children's Day, is intended to involve adults in the planning and leadership of the day. As members of the congregation, adults must recognize the challenges facing children in our nation, and their collective responsibility to respond. However, the Children's Sabbath is an important time to include children and youths in the planning and leadership of the worship service and all other events.

For example, children and youths can:

- Have an overnight "lock in" at the church beforehand to learn about worship and plan their parts in the Children's Sabbath.
- Design and paint the paraments (e.g., cloth draping the pulpit).
- Draw pictures for the bulletin cover.
- Assist and greet worshippers as they arrive or leave, light candles, or collect the offering.
- Begin the Children's Sabbath by entering in a procession. The children could carry a banner they made.
- Read prayers and scriptural passages and lead responsive readings.
- Write a prayer to be used in the service.
- Present a short drama or liturgical dance as part of the service.
- Sing a special anthem or play an instrumental piece, or perform a song in sign language.
- Remain throughout the entire service instead of departing for church school classes. If the children remain throughout, ensure that the worship service appropriately engages them.
- Have adults "adopt" children to sit with during the service.

Catholic Liturgy for Children's Sabbath

This sample liturgy provides suggestions for incorporating the focus of the National Observance of Children's Sabbaths into the standard liturgy for the **29th Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year C, which falls on October 20, 2013.**

Introductory Rites

Entrance Song: "God is Here! As We His People" (#667; this and all other hymn numbers refer to *Worship*, GIA Publications) or "Gather Us In" (#665).

Greeting

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

Amen.

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

And also with you.

We have gathered on this special day to mark the 22nd National Observance of Children's Sabbaths. Today, we join our hearts, hands, and voices with people of faith in thousands of congregations nationwide to lift up the needs of children and commit faithfully to respond.

Through the prophets God has called us to beat swords into plowshares, to replace weapons and war with peace and plenty. Yet in our nation today, millions of children suffer from the violence of guns and child poverty. Let us be the people of God who transform our culture from one of weapons to one of peace, from one of poverty to one in which families have the tools for economic security. In the words of St. Francis of Assisi, let us pray that we will be instruments of peace.

Penitential Rite

Priest: Coming together as God's family, with confidence let us ask the Father's forgiveness, for God is full of gentleness and compassion.

Lord Jesus, you came as a child in the fullness of humanity that we may know God's love for us.

Lord, have mercy.

People: Lord, have mercy.

Priest: Lord Jesus, you called the children to you and blessed them that we may know God's love for children. Christ, have mercy.

People: Christ, have mercy.

Priest: Lord Jesus, you will judge us by how we care for the least of these our brothers and sisters.

Lord, have mercy.

People: Lord, have mercy.

Priest: May almighty God have mercy on us, forgive us our sins, and bring us to everlasting life.

People: Amen.

Gloria

Opening Prayer

Let us pray.
Almighty and ever-living God,
our source of power and inspiration,
give us strength and joy
in serving you as followers of Christ,
who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever. **Amen.**

Liturgy of the Word

First Reading: Exodus 17:8-13

The Word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

Responsorial Psalm: Psalm #120

Second Reading: 2 Timothy 3:14-4:2

The Word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

Gospel Acclamation

Priest: Alleluia.

People: Alleluia.

Priest: Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it.
(Lk. 18:17)

People: Alleluia.

Gospel: Luke 18:1-8

Homily

[See Sermon Notes later in this section.]

Profession of Faith: The Nicene Creed

General Intercessions (Prayer of the Faithful)

My brothers and sisters, through this common prayer, let us pray to our Lord Jesus Christ, not only for ourselves and our own needs, but for all people, young and old, near and far, responding Lord, make us instruments of your peace.

For the holy Church of God, that we follow in the footsteps of the Prince of Peace and serve with compassion the last, the least, the lost, and the littlest ones, let us pray,

Lord, make us instruments of your peace.

For all the peoples of the world, especially those wounded by war and those who bear the brunt of poverty, that we heed the prophets' call to beat swords into plowshares and work to transform our world from one of weapons and want to one of peace and plenty, let us pray,

Lord, make us instruments of your peace.

For our nation and our leaders, that we seek to unite and not divide, to place a priority on the poor and not the powerful, grant us wisdom, compassion, and commitment to justice and peace, let us pray,
Lord, make us instruments of your peace.

For all our brothers and sisters in need, especially the children and families suffering from gun violence and the violence of poverty, let us pray,
Lord, make us instruments of your peace.

For ourselves and our community, that we join with people of all faiths across our nation to make our nation and world safe for children, let us pray,
Lord, make us instruments of your peace.

God of love, who shelters us like a mother hen and welcomes us like a father,
hear the prayers of your Church,
and grant us today what we ask of you in faith.
We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Liturgy of the Eucharist

Preparation of the Altar and the Gifts

(You may wish to have children bring up the bread and wine or other gifts.)

Offertory Song: "Praise the Lord! You Heavens, Adore Him" (#529)

Prayer Over the Gifts

Lord God, may the gifts we offer
bring us your love and forgiveness
and give us freedom to serve you with our lives.
We ask this in the name of Jesus the Lord.

Eucharistic Prayer

Communion Rite

The Lord's Prayer

Doxology

Sign of Peace

Breaking of the Bread

Communion

Communion Song: "I Come with Joy to Meet My Lord" (#726)

Song of Praise: "There's a Spirit in the Air" (#531) or "Earth and All Stars" (#517)

Prayer after Communion

Let us pray.

Lord, may this eucharist help us to remain faithful.

May it teach us the way to eternal life.

Grant this through Christ our Lord.

Amen.

Concluding Rite

Greeting

The Lord be with you.

And also with you.

Blessing

Bow your heads and pray for God's blessing.

Jesus taught us, "Blessed are the peacemakers." May God grant you the vision, strength, and courage to proclaim God's message of peace whether welcome or unwelcome, for the sake of God's beloved children.

May almighty God bless you,
the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

Amen.

Dismissal

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

Episcopal Liturgy for the Children's Sabbath

This sample liturgy provides suggestions for incorporating the focus of the National Observance of Children's Sabbaths into the standard Episcopal liturgy for **Proper 24, Year C**, which falls on **October 20, 2013**.

Throughout the liturgy, we have provided two options, one from *The Book of Common Prayer* and the other from *Enriching Our Worship: Supplemental Liturgical Materials* prepared by The Standing Commission on Liturgy and Music of The Episcopal Church.

While a few hymn suggestions are noted in the liturgy, on p. 27-28 is a more extensive list of especially appropriate hymns including many from *The Hymnal 1982* and *Wonder, Love, and Praise: A Supplement to The Hymnal 1982* to insert where appropriate.

The Word of God

Hymn: Joyful, Joyful We Adore Thee #304, Immortal, Invisible, God Only Wise (#423); God the Sculptor of the Mountains (#746, WLP)

Opening Sentences

Option 1:

(From *The Book of Common Prayer*, hereafter referred to as BCP)

Celebrant: Blessed be God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

People: And blessed be His kingdom, now and forever. Amen.

Option 2:

(From *Enriching Our Worship: Supplemental Liturgical Materials* prepared by The Standing Commission on Liturgy and Music, hereafter referred to as EOW)

Celebrant: Blessed be the one, holy, and living God.

People: Glory to God forever and ever.

Celebrant may say:

Almighty God, to you all hearts are open, all desires known, and from you no secrets are hid: Cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit, that we may perfectly love you, and worthily magnify your holy Name; through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Song of Praise: God Is Love (#379); Creating God, Your Fingers Trace (#394)

The Collect of the Day

Option 1: (BCP)

Celebrant: The Lord be with you.

People: And also with you.

Celebrant: Let us pray.

Proper 24 (BCP)

Almighty and everlasting God, in Christ who came as a child you have revealed your glory among the nations. Preserve the works of your mercy, that your Church throughout the world may persevere with steadfast faith in the confession of your Name; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, forever and ever.

People: Amen.

Option 2: (EOW)

Celebrant: God be with you.

People: And also with you.

Celebrant: Let us pray.

On the Children's Sabbath

Loving God, through your prophets you call us to turn swords into plowshares. Embolden your Church to replace weapons and want with peace and plenty, for the sake of all children; through Jesus Christ your Child who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God for ever and ever.

People: Amen.

The Lessons

A Reading from Genesis 32:3-8, 22-30

Option 1: (BCP)

After each reading, the Reader says:

The Word of the Lord.

People: Thanks be to God.

Option 2: (EOW)

After each reading, the Reader says:

Hear what the Spirit is saying to the churches.

People: Thanks be to God.

Gradual Hymn

A Reading from 2 Timothy 3:14-4:5

Gospel Announcement

Option 1: (BCP)

The Holy Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, according to St. Luke.

People: Glory to you, Lord Christ.

Option 2: (EOW)

The Holy Gospel of our Savior Jesus Christ, according to St. Luke.

Gospel: Luke 18:1-8a

After the Gospel, the Reader says:

The Gospel of the Lord.

People: Praise to you, Lord Christ.

The Sermon

(See Sermon Resources on pages 30-41)

The Nicene Creed

The Prayers of the People and Confession of Sin

Option 1: Form II, Form IV, or Form VI which follows: (BCP)

In peace, we pray to you, Lord God.

Silence.

For all people in their daily life and work;

For our families, friends, and neighbors, and for those who are alone.

For this community, the nation and the world;

For all who work for justice, freedom, and peace.

For the just and proper use of our creation;

For the victims of hunger, fear, injustice, and oppression.

For all who are in danger, sorrow, or any kind of trouble;

For those who minister to the sick, the friendless, and the needy.

For the peace and unity of the Church of God;

For all who proclaim the Gospel, and all who seek the Truth.

For [N. our presiding Bishop, and N. (N.) our Bishop(s); and for] all bishops and other ministers;

For all who serve God in his Church.

For the special needs and concerns of this congregation.

Silence.

The people may add their own petitions.

Hear us, Lord;
For your mercy is great.
We thank you, Lord, for all the blessings of this life.

Silence.

The people may add their own thanksgivings.

We will exalt you, O God our King;
And praise your Name for ever and ever.

We pray for all who have died, that they may have a place in your eternal kingdom.

Silence.

The People may add their own petitions

Lord, let your loving-kindness be upon them;
Who put their trust in you.

We pray to you also for the forgiveness of our sins.

Silence may be kept.

Leader and People

Have mercy upon us, most merciful Father;
In your compassion forgive us our sins,
Known and unknown,
Things done and left undone;
And so uphold us by your Spirit
That we may live and serve you in newness of life,
To the honor and glory of your name;
Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Option 2:

With all our heart and with all our mind, let us pray, saying, "Lord, make us instruments of your peace."

For the body of Christ, that we follow in the footsteps of the Prince of Peace and serve with compassion the last, the least, the lost, and the littlest ones, let us pray,
Lord, make us instruments of your peace.

For our nation and our leaders, that we seek to unite and not divide, to place a priority on the poor and not the powerful, grant us the wisdom, compassion, and commitment to justice and peace, let us pray,
Lord, make us instruments of your peace.

For our world wounded by war and in which a billion people bear the brunt of poverty, that we heed the prophets' call to beat swords into plowshares and work to transform our world from one of weapons and want to one of peace and plenty, let us pray,

Lord, make us instruments of your peace.

For ourselves and our community, when it is easier to be distracted than to demand justice, to feel daunted rather than determined to seek peace, grant us your sense of urgency and persistence as we pursue justice and peace, let us pray,

Lord, make us instruments of your peace.

On this Children's Sabbath day, we pray especially for the children and families suffering from gun violence and the violence of poverty, and for ourselves that we join with people of all faiths across our nation to make our nation and world safe for children, let us pray,

Lord, make us instruments of your peace.

For all who have died, especially the seven children killed by guns each and every day in our nation, we pray to the Lord,

Lord, make us instruments of your peace.

Leader and People:

God of all mercy,

We confess that we have failed to live our lives as ones made in your image,

We have not loved each other as sisters and brothers,

We have not welcomed all children and so welcomed you,

We have left stumbling blocks in the way of too many children.

Forgive us our sins,

As a woman searching for a cherished coin,

As a father welcoming a beloved child home,

And uphold us by your Spirit

That we may do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with you,

Through our Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Absolution

Option 1: (BCP)

The Bishop when present, or the Priest:

Almighty God have mercy on you, forgive you

all your sins through our Lord, Jesus Christ, strengthen you in all goodness, and by the power of the Holy Spirit keep you in eternal life. Amen.

Option 2: (EOW)

Almighty God have mercy on you, forgive you all your sins through the grace of Jesus Christ, strengthen you in all goodness, and by the power of the Holy Spirit keep you in eternal life. Amen.

The Peace

The Celebrant says to the people:

Let us share the peace of Christ with one another, and give thanks for the children among us who show us new ways to walk in peace together.

Option 1: (BCP)
Celebrant: The peace of the Lord be always with you.
People: And also with you.

Option 2: (EOW)
Celebrant: The peace of Christ be always with you.
People: And also with you.

The Holy Communion

Offertory: With Awe Approach the Mysteries (#759 WLP), For the Beauty of the Earth (#416), For the Fruit of All Creation (#424), Tell Out My Soul, the Greatness of the Lord (#438), Lord, You Give the Great Commission (#528, The Hymnal 1982; #780, WLP), We Are All One in Mission (#778, WLP)

(You may wish to include the Act of Commitment as a way for parishioners to make an offering of themselves—their time, commitment, voices.)

The Great Thanksgiving

Option 1: Eucharistic Prayer C (BCP)

Proper Preface for Children's Sabbath

Because you have blessed us with children and have given your own Child, the Prince of Peace, Jesus Christ, to reveal the fullness of your love and mercy.

Option 2: **Eucharistic Prayer for the Children's Sabbath**

Celebrant: The Lord be with you.
People: And also with you.
Celebrant: Lift up your hearts.
People: We lift them to the Lord.
Celebrant: Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.
People: It is right to give our thanks and praise.

Celebrant: We give you thanks and praise, amazing God,
who made heaven and earth and sea, and
all that is in them,
who keeps faith forever,
who executes justice for the oppressed,
who gives food to the hungry;
You watch over the strangers,
uphold the children and most vulnerable parents,
and have triumphed over sin and evil.
(from Psalm 146)

On this Children's Sabbath day, we give you thanks, O God, especially for children, for the blessing they are and the blessing we may be to them, as we seek to heed your prophets and beat swords into plowshares and do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with you.

And so we join the saints and angels in
proclaiming your glory, as we sing (say),

Celebrant and People:

Holy, holy, holy Lord, God of power
and might, heaven and earth are full of your glory.
Hosanna in the highest.
Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord.
Hosanna in the highest.

The Celebrant continues:

We praise you, O God,
for sending your beloved child Jesus
born as a baby
nurtured by his family,
and protected by strangers,
who grew as a child
who was taught in his temple,
surrounded by his community,
and guided by his parents,
who became an adult
who loved and blessed the children,
who cared for those who were sick,
poor, and left out,
who taught that God loves us like a parent,
and who called us his friends.
This one who was born a baby needing us
died our Savior whom we all need,
triumphant even over death,
freeing us to live as your beloved children.

(At the following words concerning the bread, the Celebrant is to hold it, or lay a hand upon it; and at the words concerning the cup, to hold or place a hand upon the cup and any other vessel containing the wine to be consecrated.)

On the night before he died for us, Jesus was at the table with his friends. He took bread, gave thanks, broke it, and gave it to them, and said: "Take, eat: This is my Body, which is given for you. As you do this, remember me."

As supper was ending, Jesus took the cup of wine. Again, he gave thanks, gave it to them, and said: "Drink this, all of you: This is my Blood of the new Covenant, which is poured out for you and for all for the forgiveness of sins. Whenever you drink it, remember me."

Around your table, as your children,
O God, we remember Jesus Christ,
Who came in love, lived in love, and died in love,
Who was and is and is to come.

We offer to you our gifts of bread and wine,
And we offer to you our lives.

Pour out your Spirit upon these gifts that they may be for us the body and blood of Christ, that they strengthen us to welcome the children, to show your love, to work for your justice, to bring your peace. Through Christ and with Christ and in Christ, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, to you be honor, glory, and praise, for ever and ever. Amen.

The Lord's Prayer

The Breaking of the Bread

Option 1: (BCP)

Alleluia. Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us;
Therefore let us keep the feast. Alleluia.

Option 2: (EOW)

We break this bread to share in the Body of Christ.
We who are many are one body, for we all share in the one bread.

Communion Hymn: As We Gather at Your Table (#763), Go Forth for God (#347), Now Let Us Rise the Hymn the Grace (#781 WLP)

Post Communion Prayer

Option 1: (BCP)

Let us pray.
Eternal God, heavenly Father,
You have graciously accepted us as living members
of your Son our Savior, Jesus Christ,
and you have fed us with spiritual food
in the Sacrament of his Body and Blood.
Send us now into the world in peace,
and grant us strength and courage
to love and serve you
with gladness and singleness of heart,
through Christ our Lord.
Amen.

Option 2: (adapted from EOW)

Loving God,
we give you thanks
for restoring us in your image
and nourishing us with spiritual food
in the Sacrament of Christ's Body and Blood.
Now send us forth
a people, forgiven, healed, renewed;
that we may proclaim your love to the world
through serving the children
and continue in the risen life of Christ our Savior.
Amen.

The Blessing (EOW)

May the blessing of the God of Abraham and Sarah, and of Jesus Christ born of our sister Mary, and of the Holy Spirit, who broods over the world as a mother over her children, be upon you and remain with you always. Amen.

The Dismissal

Celebrant: Remembering especially all our children, go in peace to love and serve the Lord.

People: Thanks be to God.

A Protestant Worship Service

This service provides a model for incorporating the focus of the National Observance of Children's Sabbaths into a Protestant service. It should be adapted as appropriate to conform to your congregation and denomination. It draws on one of the texts designated in the Revised Common Lectionary for the **29th Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year C** (October 20, 2013).

Call to Worship (based on Psalm 122)

I was glad when they said to me,
"Let us go to the house of the Lord!"
Our feet are standing within your gates,
O Jerusalem.

**We gather with gladness in the Lord's house
on this Children's Sabbath day.**

Pray for the peace of Jerusalem:
"May they prosper who love you.
Peace be within your walls,
And security within your towers."

**We gather to pray with our words and our lives
so that all of God's children will one day know
peace and economic security.**

For the sake of my relatives and friends
I will say, "Peace be within you."
For the sake of the house of the Lord our God
I will seek your good.

**We gather in God's name, who claims us all as kin,
to speak out and seek peace and justice
for the sake of all God's children.**

Come, let us worship God.

Hymn of Praise: Like a Mother Who Has Borne Us (words by Daniel Bechtel)

Call to Confession

Our world and our lives do not fully reflect the love and justice and peace God intends.
We confess our sins *not* to feel bad or sad or scared,
But because we *trust* that God loves us, forgives us, and will help us to turn in a new direction.
Trusting in that promise, let us join in this time of confession.

Prayer of Confession

We cannot change what we do not confess.

Hear us, O God, as we confess the ways that we have failed you
by failing to love and protect all children. *[Time for silent prayers.]*

Gracious God, forgive us
for weeping without work,
for love without labor,
for prayer without action.

Forgive us for crying, “Peace, peace,” when there is no peace.
There is violence in our world, nation, and communities,
and even in some of our homes—
We confess that too often we deny it instead of resolving it.

There is anger, fear, and pain
in our nation and neighborhoods,
schools and souls—
forgive us for failing to respond with love to help and heal it.

Guide us in your ways of peace and love,
justice and joy, forgiveness and faithfulness.
Help us now to turn in a new direction,
trusting that your hand will lead us
and your vision will guide us. Amen.

Assurance of Pardon

Jesus, after asking his friends, “Who among you will give your children a stone when they ask for bread?
Or give them a snake when they ask for fish?” reassured them: If we who are not perfect know how to give
good gifts to our children, how much more will God our loving Parent give good things to those who ask.

We have asked for forgiveness.
Friends, hear and believe the good news of the Gospel:
In Jesus Christ we are forgiven.
Thanks be to God.

The Peace

Hymn: *I've Got Peace Like a River*

(This song is both easy to learn and has simple American Sign Language signs that could accompany it. You may wish to teach it ahead of time to the children of the congregation, and have them lead the congregation in singing and signing it.)

Prayer for Illumination

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., affirmed,
“Darkness cannot drive out darkness: only light can do that.
Hate cannot drive out hate: only love can do that.”

Please join me now in the prayer for illumination:

God of Peace, by your Spirit
fill our hearts and minds
with your light and your love
that we may hear and heed your Word
and reflect your light and love.
Amen.

First Reading: Micah 4:1-5 (*for those not following a lectionary*)

Anthem/Hymn: *O God of Every Nation, or Behold a Broken World*

Gospel Reading: Luke 18:1-8a

Sermon

(See Sermon Resources in this section.)

Hymn: *For the Healing of the Nations* (words by Fred Kaan to the tune of Westminster Abbey)

Affirmation of Faith

(Select one from your tradition that most closely relates to the day's theme.)

Other Liturgical Responses to the Word

(According to your tradition, one or more of the following may be incorporated into the service: Baptism, reaffirmation of baptismal vows, or other pastoral rite of the Church.)

Prayers of the People

With all our heart and with all our mind, let us pray, saying, "Lord, make us instruments of your peace."

For the body of Christ, that we follow in the footsteps of the Prince of Peace and serve with compassion the last, the least, the lost, and the littlest ones, let us pray,
Lord, make us instruments of your peace.

For our nation and our leaders, that we seek to unite and not divide, to place a priority on the poor and not the powerful, grant us the wisdom, compassion, and commitment to justice and peace, let us pray,
Lord, make us instruments of your peace.

For our world, wounded by war and in which a billion people bear the brunt of poverty, that we heed the prophets' call to beat swords into plowshares and work to transform our world from one of weapons and want to one of peace and plenty, let us pray,
Lord, make us instruments of your peace.

For ourselves and our community, when it is easier to be distracted than to demand justice, to feel daunted rather than determined to seek peace, grant us your sense of urgency and persistence as we pursue justice and peace, let us pray,
Lord, make us instruments of your peace.

On this Children's Sabbath day, we pray especially for the children and families suffering from gun violence and the violence of poverty, and for ourselves that we join with people of all faiths across our nation to make our nation and world safe for children, let us pray,

Lord, make us instruments of your peace.

For all who have died, especially the seven children killed by guns each and every day in our nation, we pray to the Lord,

Lord, make us instruments of your peace.

Amen.

The Eucharist

(Congregations that will be celebrating the Lord's Supper should include the appropriate liturgical material.

See also pages 13–15)

Hymn of Commitment: **Lead Us From Death to Life** (words by Marty Haugen, tune: World Peace prayer) or **Let There Be Peace on Earth** (words may be adapted “With God as our Parent, children all are we” for inclusivity.)

Lyrics for “Let There Be Peace on Earth”

By Jill Jackson and Sy Miller

Let there be peace on earth
And let it begin with me;
Let there be peace on earth,
The peace that was meant to be.

With God as our Father
Brothers all are we,
Let me walk with my brother
In perfect harmony.

Let peace begin with me,
Let this be the moment now;
With every step I take,
Let this be my solemn vow:

To take each moment and live each moment
In peace eternally.
Let there be peace on earth
And let it begin with me.

Copyrighted alternate lyrics:

With God our Creator
Family all are we,
Let us walk with each other
In perfect harmony.

Or

With Earth as our Mother
Family all are we,
Let us walk with each other
In perfect harmony.

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Charge and Blessing

May the God of Life,
Christ, the Prince of Peace,
and the Spirit, whom Jesus called the Advocate,
be with you and every child of God
this day forth and forever more. Amen.

Sung Benediction: Go Now in Peace

Additional Prayers and Other Worship Resources

Call to Worship

This is the day that the Lord has made!
We will rejoice and be glad in it.

This day is Children's Sabbath!
We will give thanks and seek justice
for the children in our midst and all across our nation.
Come, let us worship God.

Prayer of Confession

Gentle and holy God, we acknowledge to you, to one another, and to ourselves that we are not what you have called us to be. We have stifled our gifts and wasted our time. We have avoided opportunities to offer kindness, but have been quick to take offense. We have pretended that we could make no contribution to peace and justice in our world and have excused ourselves from risk-taking in our community. Have mercy on us, forgive us our sins, and help us to live our lives differently, we pray in the name of Jesus Christ, whose call to follow haunts our every prayer.

(from *The New Century Hymnal*, #835, by Maren Tirabassi, Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press © 1995.
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Prayer of Confession

God of love and justice, we long for peace within and peace without. We long for harmony in our families, for serenity in the midst of struggle, and for commitment to each other's growth. We long for the day when our homes will be a dwelling place for your love. Yet we confess that we are often anxious; we do not trust each other, and we harbor violence. We are not willing to take the risks and make the hard choices that love requires. Look upon us with kindness and grace. Rule in our homes and in all the world; show us how to walk in your paths, through the mercy of our Savior. Amen.

(from *The New Century Hymnal*, #836, adapted from a prayer by Ruth Duck, *Flames of the Spirit*, © 1992, Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press © 1995. All rights reserved. Used by permission.)

Prayer of Confession

Gracious God,
We confess that in our lives we do not always choose the way of peace. We spread gossip which fans the flames of hatred. We are ready to make any sacrifice when the world demands, but few when God invites. We worship the false god of security. We are tempted to trust in locks, security systems, and guns for our protection. We hold out one hand in friendship, but keep a weapon in the other behind our back. We have divided our communities into those we trust and those we do not. Huge problems challenge us in the world and in our own communities, but our greed, fear and selfishness prevent us from uniting to solve them. Lord, we need your help and forgiveness, your healing and reconciling power. Help us all to lay down our weapons and take up your cross. Amen.

(adapted from National Council of Churches of Christ, "An Ecumenical Celebration of the Word," www.nccusa.org/2004ecumenicalcelebration.html)

Prayer of Confession

O God of all people,
We know that you are as near as our next breath.
Wherever we go, you are already there.
Thank you for creating us in your image, and claiming us as your children.

O Lord, we confess that we have forgotten who we are;
that each of us belongs to you.

We confess that we have forsaken your peaceable kingdom,
and allowed gun violence to shatter our communities.

Forgive us O God.

Remind us that your love is more powerful than any gun and
that your spirit will sustain us as nothing else can.

Let us desire, as you desire, forgiveness rather than revenge,
reconciliation rather than retribution.

Give us the courage to live not by the gun but by your spirit.

Open our hearts to you so that we also may open them to each other.

Guide us on the path of peace.

In the name of all who love you, we pray, Amen.

(Rachel Smith, Vigils Against Violence from NC Council of Churches website)

Prayer

Let us remember tonight those who are in the bonds of poverty, who have neither sufficient food nor drink, the beauty of home, or the love of beauty. Bring us the day, O God, when the world shall no longer know such poverty as stunts growth and feeds crime, and teach us to realize that such things are not necessary to earth but are the result of our greed and selfishness, our wastefulness and willful forgetting. Amen.

(from *The New Century Hymnal*, #861, by W.E.B. DuBois, Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press © 1995.

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Prayer

Loving God, we, your children, long for the day when your shalom is the dominant culture.

We long for the day when we would turn swords into plowshares;
when our governments would grow more food than build weapons;
when we build more schools than prisons.

Patient God, we, your children, long for the day when your shalom is the dominant culture.

We long for the day when people worship you freely without threat of terror and harm upon ourselves, our houses of worship, or our sacred texts;
when we respect each other's humanity;
when we treat each other with equality and justice.

Liberating God, we your children, long for the day when your shalom is the dominant culture.

We long for the day when those unjustly detained are set free;

When torture ends;

When we realize Fannie Lou Hamer's words: "no one is free until everyone is free."

Merciful God, we, your children, long for the day when your shalom is the dominant culture.

We confess that we have not always been willing participants of your mandate for peace;
that we have often perpetuated injustice and caused violence.

Give us the strength to work for peace and live in peace.

Redeeming God, we, your children, long for the day when your shalom is the dominant culture.

Bless our prayers and acts toward peace that we may testify to your loving, your grace.

Make us your peacemakers with every small and large act toward your justice.
With you, O God, we shall work together for the day of shalom for which we long!
Hallelujah! Amen.

(The Rev. Bridgett Green, for the 2012 International Day of Peace, from
Presbyterian Peacemaking website)

Prayer

O God of peace, guide the peoples and nations to make today a day of peace, a day when wars are suspended and weapons laid aside. May the spirit of this day of peace guide us to the time when bows are broken, spears are shattered, weapons are dismantled, war is no more, and peace prevails throughout your world. Bless anew the peacemakers who work for that time. Inspire us to join them. In Jesus Christ we pray.
Amen.

(The Rev. W. Mark Koenig)

A Litany on the Tragedy of Gun Violence

We celebrate and give thanks for the **vision**
of all people living together, in justice and in peace;
we give thanks for all who work to make that vision a reality.
We gather to rededicate ourselves to addressing the evil of gun violence
which haunts our country.

Some 30,000 people die by gun fire each year in the United States.

And we grieve.

On average eighty people are killed by guns every day, including eight children.

And our hearts break.

An American child is twelve times more likely to die by a gun than are the children who live in all twenty-five industrialized nations combined.

And we weep.

The annual economic cost of gun violence in America is estimated to at least \$100 billion. Medical costs, decimated families, the court system, our jails and prisons, and security measures in airports, schools, and public buildings all contribute to this sum.

And sorrow sweeps over us.

Since John F. Kennedy was assassinated in 1963, more Americans have died by gun fire within our own country than American servicemen and women who were killed in all our wars of the 20th century.

And we pray.

Faced with gun violence,

We grieve for those are killed and those whose lives are forever changed;

We seek to comfort for those who have lost loved ones;

We pray for a change of heart for those who resort to violence.

Faced with gun violence, may we

Educate;

Organize;

Advocate;

And in all the ways we can, work for that day when

Guns violence is no more.

May it be so.

May we so do.

(The Rev. W. Mark Koenig, Coordinator, Presbyterian Peacemaking Program, written for the Rev.
Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Day 2010)

Responsive Reading

Let us remember all who have been harmed by violence.

We acknowledge the strength of those who survived and of those still struggling to heal.

For their sake and for ours, we commit ourselves to building each other up and to healing together.

Let us remember the families and loved ones of those who have died in violent crimes.

We acknowledge their pain and their deep grief.

They too are part of our community and need our love and help towards healing.

Let us remember the perpetrators, and the families of those who commit violent crimes.

We acknowledge that their lives too are devastated and their hopes dashed.

For their sake and for ours, we remember that pain goes out in many directions from each act of violence.

We will stand up to violence.

We stand together expressing our unity,

Our connection to each other and to God,

Our hope for healing and for transformation.

Let the Spirit of our Creator move through us.

Help us to transform and heal our communities,

And let us begin by transforming ourselves.

We go in peace and with hope. Amen.

(adapted from "Words of Prayer," www.godnotguns.org)

A Prayer for an End to Violence

God of life,

Every act of violence in our world, in our communities, between myself and others, destroys a part of your creation.

Stir in my heart a renewed sense of reverence for all life.

Give me the vision to recognize your spirit in every human being, however they behave towards me.

Make possible the impossible by cultivating in me the fertile seed of healing love.

May I play my part in breaking the cycle of violence by realizing that peace begins with me.

In the name of Christ, who is our peace, Amen.

(adapted from St. Ethelburga's Centre for Reconciliation and Peace, "Prayer for an End to Violence," www.stethelburgas.org/prayer.html)

A Prayer of Hope

Beloved God, we give you thanks for the life and message of Jesus, Jesus the Rebel, who remains our guide and inspiration and the promise of Hope in our time. For Jesus calls us to love in a time of indifference, to non-violence in a time of injustice, and to life in a time of death. He teaches us not only how to live, but how to die; how to transform not only the world, but our own broken hearts, as well. His revolution transcends all our dreams for a better world and declares your reign here and now, at this very moment in human history.

In Jesus, we meet you, our beloved God. We see your true face. From now on we know that you are not a God of despair but of hope, not a God of wrath but of mercy, not a God of condemnation but of compassion, not a God of imperial power but of suffering, not a God of domination but of loving service, not a God of oppression but of liberation, not a God who blesses injustice but the God of justice, not a God of war but of peace, not a God of violence but of nonviolence, not a God of death but of Life. From now on we know that we all have been created to share in the fullness of life, in your love and unending mercy.

We step forward into the future, supporting each other, building community, making peace, practicing nonviolence, resisting the forces of war, and reconciling with our enemies, come what may. We have met Jesus the Rebel. He is alive and goes before us, summoning us to carry on the mission of nonviolence. We have been changed forever. Beloved God, you have begun the revolution within us. Our hearts burn with the fire of Hope. Amen.

(adapted from Janet Chisholm, Episcopal Peace Fellowship,
www.epfnational.org/publish/cat_index_56.shtml)

Charge to the People

Go out into the world in peace.
Love the Lord your God
With all your heart,
With all your soul,
With all your mind;
And love your neighbor as yourself. (Matthew 22:37-40)

Charge

Go out into the world in peace;
Have courage;
Hold on to what is good;
Return no one evil for evil;
Strengthen the fainthearted;
Support the weak, and help the suffering;
Honor all people;
Love and serve the Lord,
Rejoicing in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Blessing

Now may the God of peace
make you complete in everything good
so that you may do God's will,
through Jesus Christ to whom be the glory
forever and ever, Amen. (from Hebrews 13:20-21)

May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing
So that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.
(Romans 15:13)

Music Suggestions for the 2013 Children's Sabbath

“Beating Swords into Plowshares: Ending the Violence of Guns and Child Poverty”

The following hymns may be found in a variety of hymnals including but not limited to: *African American Heritage Hymnal*; *Chalice Hymnal*; *The [Episcopal] Hymnal 1982*; *Gather*; *The Lutheran Book of Worship*; *The New Century Hymnal*; *The Presbyterian Hymnal*; *Songs of Zion*; *The United Methodist Hymnal*; *Wonder, Love and Praise*; *Worship (GLA Publications)*; and *Worship in Song: A Friends Hymnal*.

All Who Love and Serve Your City
As We Gather at Your Table
Behold a Broken World (*Micah 4:1-4 reference, in United Methodist Hymnal*)
Blessed is the God of Israel
For the Beauty of the Earth
Come Now, O Prince of Peace
Creating God, Your Fingers Trace
Cuando el Pobre/When the Poor One
Dona Nobis Pacem
Father All Loving, Who Rulest in Majesty
For the Fruit of All Creation
For the Healing of the Nations
Go Forth for God; Go to the World in Peace
Go Now in Peace
God is Love, Let Heaven Adore Him
God Of Grace And God Of Glory
God of Mercy You Have Shown Us
God the Sculptor of the Mountains
Gonna Lay Down My Sword and Shield
Gracious Spirit, Give Your Servants
Great God of Earth and Heaven
Here, O Lord, Your Servants Gather
Holy God, You Raise up Prophets
Hope of the World
I Come with Joy
I'll Praise My Maker while I've Breath
Immortal, Invisible God Only Wise
Isaiah the Prophet has Written of Old
I've Got Peace Like a River
Jesus' Hands Were Kind Hands
Jesus Loves Me
Joyful, Joyful We Adore Thee
Kum Ba Yah
Lead Us from Death to Life
Let There Be Peace on Earth

Like a Mother Who Has Borne Us
Like the Murmur of the Dove's Song

Lord, Make Us Servants of Your Peace

Lord of All Hopefulness

Lord, Whose Love Through Humble Service

Lord, You Give the Great Commission

Lord, You Have Come to the Lakeshore

New Songs of Celebration Render

Now Let Us Rise and Hymn the Grace

Now Thank We All Our God

O Day of God Draw Nigh

O Day of Peace

O God of Every Nation

O God of Love, O King of Peace

O Holy Spirit

Our Father, by Whose Name

Peace Before Us

Peace Prayer

Put Peace into Each Other's Hands

Praise the Lord, Rise Up Rejoicing

Prayer for Families

Remember Your Servants, Lord

Savior, Again to Thy Dear Name We Raise

Shalom, My Friends

Shalom To You

Tell Me the Stories of Jesus

Today We All Are Called to Be Disciples (*Micah 4:3 reference, in Presbyterian Hymnal*)

The Church Of Christ in Every Age

There's A Wideness in God's Mercy

Unidos

Vine and Fig Tree (*Micah 4:4 reference, in Worship in Song: A Friends Hymnal*)

We Shall Overcome

What Does the Lord Require

With Awe Approach the Mysteries

You Have Come Down To the Lakeshore

God of Mercy You Have Shown Us

(Carolyn Winfrey Gillette, co-pastor, Limestone Presbyterian Church,
<http://www.limestonepresbyterian.org/>. All rights reserved. Used by permission.)

A Hymn Lamenting Gun Violence

BEACH SPRING 8.7.8.7. D (“God, Whose Giving Knows No Ending”)

God of mercy, you have shown us ways of living that are good:
Work for justice, treasure kindness, humbly journey with the Lord.
Yet your people here are grieving, hurt by weapons that destroy.
Help us turn to you, believing in your way that brings us joy.

On a street where neighbors gather, shots are heard; a young girl dies.
On a campus, students scatter as the violence claims more lives.
In a family filled with anger, tempers flare and shots resound.
God of love, we weep and wonder at the violence all around.

God, we pray for those who suffer when this world seems so unfair;
May your church be quick to offer loving comfort, gentle care.
And we pray: Amid the violence, may we speak your truth, O Lord!
Give us strength to break the silence, saying, "This can be no more!"

God, renew our faith and vision; make us those who boldly lead!
May we work for just decisions that bring true security.
Help us change this violent culture based on idols, built on fear.
Help us build a peaceful future with your world of people here.

In interfaith worship services, this line may be used in the third stanza:

Change “May your church be quick to offer loving comfort, gentle care.”
to “May we all be quick to offer loving comfort, gentle care.”

Sermon Resources

The sermon or homily is one of the most powerful opportunities to proclaim God's love and concern for all of God's children and God's call to us to seek justice, pursue peace, and care for children.

The following texts are the designated readings for the churches that follow the Revised Common Lectionary, the Episcopal Lectionary, the Lutheran Lectionary, and the Roman Catholic Lectionary.

Revised Common Lectionary

Jeremiah 31:27-34 (or Genesis 32:22-31)

Psalm 119:97-104 (or Psalm 121)

2 Timothy 3:14-4:5

Luke 18:1-8

Episcopal Proper 24

Genesis 32:3-8, 22-30

Psalm 121

2 Timothy 3:14-4:5

Luke 18:1-8a (...vindicate them speedily)

Lutheran Lectionary: Twenty-Second Sunday After Pentecost

Genesis 32:22-30

2 Timothy 3:14-4:5

Luke 18:1-8a

Roman Catholic Lectionary: 29th week

Exodus 17:8-13

2 Timothy 3:14-4:2

Luke 18:1-8

The Year C lectionary texts designated for this Children's Sabbath Sunday offer deep connections and powerful messages related to the Children's Sabbath themes for those churches that follow these designated cycles of readings. The Revised Common, Roman Catholic, Lutheran, and Episcopal lectionaries share a common Gospel lesson, Luke 18:1-8 and the same Epistle, 2 Timothy 3:14-4:5. The Old Testament scripture passages vary and each offers an interesting direction to pursue in the Children's Sabbath sermon. Sermon notes on these texts follow.

For those who do not follow a lectionary, sermon notes are provided on Micah 4:1-5, the theme text for the 2013 Children's Sabbath. The Seven Day Guide for Reflection and Prayer (available for download from www.childrensdefense.org/childrenssabbaths/) is also based on Micah 4:1-5 and may provide helpful reflections in preparation for preaching.

A sample Children's Sermon is offered for a time of conversation with the children of the conversation. Use or adapt it or create your own.

Sermon Notes

On Lectionary Texts Designated for October 20, 2013

Jeremiah 31:27-34 (Revised Common Lectionary)

2 Timothy 3:14-4:5 (Episcopal, Lutheran, Revised Common, and Roman Catholic Lectionaries)

Luke 18:1-8 (Episcopal, Lutheran, Revised Common, and Roman Catholic Lectionaries)

Jeremiah 31:27-34

Context of the Passage

The book of Jeremiah contains both warning and consolation. While there was still time to warn the people and urge them to change their ways, Jeremiah did so in strong, painful language. When it was “too late,” and Israel was already suffering from the dislocation they saw as a result of their injustice and faithlessness, Jeremiah offered words of comfort. Jeremiah, like other prophetic literature in the Old Testament, reflects this transition from a period of judgment to the coming of renewal and restoration, and the need to offer an authoritative word of hope to sustain the people.

A Closer Look

The Sins of Others: In verse 30, our passage reads, “But all shall die for their own sins; the teeth of everyone who eats sour grapes shall be set on edge.” Notes one scholar, “The point of this saying was clearly not to express a doctrine or give a legal defense for the principle of shared family responsibility but rather to give voice to despair.” While it does not immediately strike the listener today this way, for Jeremiah to move to a declaration that “they shall die for their own sins” was actually a word of hope: no longer would children suffer for the sins of their parents.

Covenant: In Jeremiah, the term “covenant” comes from the language of international relations, comparable to “treaty.” Covenant represented a mutual commitment in which two parties had an agreement and responsibility, a relationship between God and Israel. However, Israel broke the covenant so egregiously and repeatedly that Israel essentially rendered the covenant null and void, so that it was no longer in force. In this passage, as elsewhere in Deuteronomistic use, law and covenant are used synonymously. Israel is promised not a new law, but a new way to understand and fulfill the original covenant revealed to Moses. Just as God promised and instructed “These words which I command you this day shall be upon your hearts,” (Deut. 6:6) words Jews repeat even to this day, so too Jeremiah promises that God will write this law on the hearts of God’s people. This fresh start is another chance to live in obedience from the inside out.

Note that instead of the term “nation,” our passage uses the more general “house of Israel.” Jeremiah acknowledged that Israel was no longer a “nation” as it had been but was now a diaspora, a scattered community. This people was now more loosely defined not only geographically but also genetically; to be of the house of Israel was less about who one’s ancestors were and more about how one was prepared to live one’s life that day with a deep understanding in one’s heart and a renewed commitment to live in relationship with God.

Preaching Themes

Covenant, from the least to the greatest

No more shall they teach one another, or say to each other, “Know the Lord,” for they shall all know me, from the least to the greatest, says the Lord; for I will forgive their iniquity, and remember their sin no more. (31:34)

Imagine our communities, nation, and world if we all knew God, if God's law were written on our hearts and revealed in our lives. Would children still be the poorest Americans? Would more than 16 million children in our rich nation live in poverty, six million of them in *extreme* poverty?

If God's law were written on our hearts and revealed in our lives, would we, in our rich nation, instead ensure that children have the food, family income, health care, and other basic things they need to live out their lives with the health and wholeness God intends? Would ours be a world in which no child dies from preventable malnutrition and disease, in which no woman bears a child for calamity, in which every young person is guided on the path to a hopeful future full of promise? What would it look like if we really lived as God's people?

Sins of our parents...

Jeremiah heralds this "new day" with the oddly good news that now one will only die for their own "sins," not for the sins of others. How is this "good news"? We've seen all too often what it means for children to die for the sins of others. We see that every few seconds around the world, an innocent child dies of malnutrition and disease that could have been prevented. We see that every minute somewhere around the world a woman dies unnecessarily in childbirth. We've seen children here in the United States die because they didn't have health coverage and the access to a doctor that most of us take for granted. We've seen children die from guns we could have better regulated and from causes we could have prevented. We know all about children dying because of the sins of others—from injustice, inequality, indifference. It's time for that new day to dawn, when no child dies from what we failed to do or because of what we have done.

2 Timothy 3:14-4:5

Context of the Passage

Unlike 1 Timothy, in which Paul is presented as a free apostle, 2 Timothy is written as though Paul is in prison and near death, abandoned by almost all of his friends; it has the tone of a "final testament," conveying a dying parent's exhortation, blessing, and warning to a "child." We don't know the author who assumed Paul's name in writing this letter which, with 1 Timothy and Titus, is commonly referred to as the Pastoral Epistles. We also don't know the precise date of composition, but it is believed to be in the early second century C.E.

The "Timothy" to whom the letter was supposedly addressed is one of Paul's closest co-workers, active in work with the churches of Thessalonica, Corinth, and Ephesus. Timothy is held up as a model and ideal, contrasted sharply with false teachers. Lois and Eunice, mentioned in 2 Timothy 1:5, are Timothy's grandmother and mother, Christians before him who nurtured him in faith.

A Closer Look

Fred Craddock in *A New Testament Commentary* points out the "sacred writings" and "All Scripture" refer to the Old Testament, as Christian writings were not yet considered Scripture. Though at the time this epistle was written, some writings, such as Paul's letters, were beginning to be highly revered, in the fictive setting represented here the Scriptures that "Timothy" would have known in his youth could only be the Jewish Scriptures.

Preaching Themes

Be Persistent

I solemnly urge you: proclaim the message; be persistent whether the time is favorable or unfavorable; convince, rebuke, and encourage, with the utmost patience in teaching. (4:1b-2)

On this Children's Sabbath weekend, the urging to proclaim the message and persist whether the time is favorable or unfavorable is a powerful message. The Rev. Jim Wallis, founder of Sojourners and author of *God's Politics*, jokes that you can recognize elected leaders in Washington because they are the ones walking around with their fingers in the air to see which way the wind is blowing. In our day, elected leaders do consult polls and focus groups and lead with an eye to campaign contributions and getting votes. This makes our steady witness as people of faith all the more important. We don't decide what is right by what is popular, we aren't called to speak up when it is convenient and bite our lips when it is not. Instead, we are called to proclaim God's intention for justice, God's demand that we protect those who are poor and powerless and young and vulnerable first, whether it is popular or not, whether the political climate is favorable or unfavorable. When the vote for sensible gun safety measures such as background checks failed to pass in Congress, some might have been tempted to give up. But this passage encourages us to persist whatever the political weather to proclaim what we believe is right.

Itchy Ears

For the time is coming when people will not put up with sound doctrine, but having itching ears, they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own desires, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander away to myths. (4:3-4)

Do you remember as a child, asking your mother for something, and if her answer was “no,” going to your father and asking him the question, hoping to get the answer you wanted? Our passage from Timothy warns us of the danger of “itchy ears,” looking for those who will tell us what we want to hear, not the truth. In an election season, it is particularly hard to find those who are willing to tell the truth and not to pander to “itchy ears.” Who wants to hear a candidate say that we need to invest more resources to provide for the needs of others? Who wants to hear that our lack of investment in children or failure to pass sensible gun safety measures has cost children their lives? Who wants to hear that we as parents, teachers, communities, and a nation have turned our backs on too many poor and minority youths, or, worse, that we have pushed them into the Cradle to Prison Pipeline instead of on to paths of promise? Who wants to hear that tax breaks for millionaires and billionaires have driven our nation deeper into debt and caused us to cut programs serving the poor? Wouldn't we rather hear the smooth words of a slogan, the easy words of a false promise, the comforting words of simple assurance? Wouldn't we rather hear candidates sling mud at each other than tell the truth about the quicksand on which our nation now stands, sinking in a culture of power, greed, violence, and superficial distraction? Wouldn't we rather hear that we can't afford to provide for the needs of our nation's children than that we have simply chosen not to make it our priority?

We must decide if we will indulge our itchy ears and pursue leaders who will suit our own desires, or if we will attune our ears to hear the truth—difficult as it may be to hear. If we will seek silence to listen to our hearts and the call of our God to do justice for the least, the last, and the left out. If we will listen with careful discernment that sees through the rhetoric, sound bite, and slogan to discover who is willing to tell the hard truth about what our nation needs to do to live out God's intention for justice and compassion.

Luke 18:1-8

Context of the Passage

Luke, writing toward the end of the first century C.E., was addressing a community that was several generations removed from Jesus. His readers were enduring abuse and persecution and hard times because of their faith.

Our passage is situated in the midst of Jesus' teachings on his final journey to Jerusalem. The preceding passage, like our passage, is unique to Luke's gospel. Both address the longing of the disciples for the advent of the kingdom and their final vindication, both speak to the question of "when" and "how long." The preceding passage addresses the longing of the disciples for the coming of the Son of man and their deliverance from the suffering they endure. Our parable assures the disciples that God will not long delay, but leaves them with the challenging question: Will they have persisted faithfully until that time? The parable that follows our passage cautions the listeners against self-righteousness and complacency, and is then followed by the beloved story of Jesus blessing the children.

A Closer Look

The main characters in our parable represent two extremes. First, there is the judge. A judge, then as now, was a symbol of power, one with responsibility to exercise fairness in settling disputes, to restore justice. A good and impartial judge was the best hope of weaker and powerless members of the community who were dependent on him to help secure justice for them. Our judge, who neither feared nor had respect for people, was unjust. (Note that in the parable, we are "hearing" his inner thoughts, what he is saying to himself, so we know they are his true sentiments.)

At the other end of the power spectrum stands the widow. Fred Craddock in *The People's New Testament Commentary* elaborates, "Widows in Israelite tradition were extremely vulnerable—they could not inherit their husband's property, there was no organized social welfare program, and for the most part no opportunity for independent employment for them. They were often dependent on the judge for protection and fairness, since they were easily victimized. In this story the judge is the widow's only hope for justice, and he is a bad judge." (p. 249)

In our passage, the phrase translated "wear me out" literally means "hit me in the eye." It may be meant literally or metaphorically—that she might "beat him up" in the view of the public.

So what does the bad judge do? Astoundingly, he grants the widow justice. This big, bad judge, who isn't afraid of God or people, grants the poor and vulnerable widow justice.

Note that the judge does the right thing for the wrong reason. In our advocacy on behalf of children, we can look for the best intentions of our elected leaders, can appeal to their deepest desires to do the right thing. However, there may also be times that we simply need to exert enough pressure, persistently enough, that even those who aren't inclined to do the right thing for our children will, simply because we successfully pressure them to.

Note also that the widow, who was presented as a poor and vulnerable figure, was not powerless. Often, advocates speak of "empowering" those who are poor or vulnerable. But no one gave the widow her power—she discovered and exercised it herself. Part of our work for justice isn't about "empowering" others but is about getting out of their way as they tap and exercise their own inherent power, lift their own voices to express their own best understanding of their need and the justice they demand.

Will not God grant justice? This is one of the “how much more” parables that makes its point by moving from the lesser to the greater. That is, the unjust judge certainly isn't the stand-in, equivalent figure for God in this parable. The point is that if an unjust judge grants justice, how much more quickly will a just and loving God, who is so much greater than the miserable unjust judge, grant justice. Be careful that listeners, especially children and young people, understand this point.

What are we to make of the word “quickly”? Luke was addressing believers who, several generations after Jesus' time, were enduring long years of persecution and hard times. The preceding passage (Luke 17:20-37) acknowledges their earnest, eager longing for the end time of vindication. Now this parable promising that God will “quickly” grant justice to God's chosen ones. Craddock points out that in this instance “quickly” is not about calendar or clock time, but means instead that God won't hesitate (unlike the judge) to bring vindication and justice. We don't need to wait for God to come around to our side because God is already there. It is the difference between *chronos*, calendar time, and *kairos*, God's time. This is an important, and challenging, distinction to raise for listeners—especially those who are enduring suffering themselves, for whom help seems slow to come, for those who have spent long years advocating for justice, for whom a better world for our children seems slow to arrive. We can't promise the date or the time by which God's healing will be experienced in our lives, the date or time by which justice will be realized in our world. What we can promise is that we don't have to persuade God to yearn for our wholeness, don't have to change God's mind to make God intend us to live in a world of justice. God already does.

Craddock notes that Luke's phrase, “When the Son of Man comes” links our parable to the preceding passage that sought to discourage speculation that the end will come soon. The question was phrased in a way that the expected response is “no.” Rather than suggesting that there will not be any faithful ones at that time, Luke was reminding his readers that this journey of faith will be a marathon and not a sprint, and the greatest danger is complacency and self-righteousness, a point underscored by the parable that follows in 18:9-14.

Preaching Themes

Widow and the Judge: Persistence of the powerless up against the powerful

The parable effectively evokes the experience of powerlessness before power, of dismay when one who is supposed to protect you and your interests fails to do so, and of the determination of those with less power to demand justice from the powerful. Millions of parents today know that feeling of powerlessness and frustration when they are seeking basics—like food, housing, heat, and health care—that their family needs to survive, and the systems and providers and bureaucracy seem to be no respecters of persons. Countless parents whose children have been injured or killed by guns know the feeling of powerlessness and frustration when their pleas for sensible gun safety measures are ignored by members of Congress who instead heed the NRA lobbyists.

Mark Barden is one such parent. Earlier this year, he spoke these words after the United States Senate rejected a bill extending background checks on the sale of guns (emphasis following mine):

Just four months ago, my wife Jackie and I lost our son, and our children, James and Natalie, they lost their little brother Daniel. Daniel was a first-grader at Sandy Hook Elementary School... What happened in Newtown can happen anywhere. In any instant, any dad in America could be in my shoes... No one should feel our pain or the pain felt by the tens of thousands of people who've lost loved ones to senseless gun violence.

And that's why we're here. Two weeks ago, 12 of us from Newtown came to meet with U.S. senators and have a conversation about how to bring common-sense solutions to the issues of gun violence. We came with a sense of hope, optimistic that real conversation could begin that would ultimately save the lives of so many Americans. We met with dozens of Democrats and Republicans and shared with them pictures of our children, our spouses, our parents who lost their lives on December 14th.

Expanded background checks wouldn't have saved our loved ones, but still we came to support the bipartisan proposal from two senators, both with "A" ratings from the NRA — a common-sense proposal supported by 90 percent of Americans. It's a proposal that will save lives without interfering with the rights of responsible, law-abiding gun owners.

We'll return home now, disappointed but not defeated. We return home with the determination that change will happen — maybe not today, but it will happen. It will happen soon. We've always known this would be a long road, and we don't have the luxury of turning back. We will keep moving forward and build public support for common-sense solutions in the areas of mental health, school safety, and gun safety.

We take strength from the children and loved ones that we lost, and we carry a great faith in the American people....

We will not be defeated. We are not defeated, and we will not be defeated. We are here now; we will always be here because we have no other choice. We are not going away. And every day, as more people are killed in this country because of gun violence, our determination grows stronger.

We leave Washington hoping that others, both here and across the country, will join us in making the Sandy Hook Promise, a pledge that we'd had great hope that more U.S. senators would take literally. I'd like to end by repeating the words with which the Sandy Hook Promise begins: Our hearts are broken. Our spirit is not.

Prayer

The parable of the widow and the judge, Luke tells us, is about the need to pray always and not to lose heart. It invites us to consider what it means to pray always, how many different ways we can pray throughout our day.

There are the silent prayers of our hearts, to be sure. Fervent prayers for the health of our child, for a troubled teen to find the right path, for the strength we need to continue being a voice for justice. The father from Newtown above shared, "In our deepest grief, we were supported by the love of our families and comforted by the love and prayers we received from millions of America, from every corner of the country."

There are the spoken prayers of our lips. Prayers we murmur into the downy hair of a baby, giving thanks for their health or a plea for their healing. There are the prayers some sing around the dinner table: "For health and strength and daily food, we give you thanks O God."

There are the prayers of our hands and our feet. The Reverend Billy Graham is quoted as saying, "The most eloquent prayer is the prayer through hands that heal and bless. The highest form of worship is the worship of unselfish Christian service. The greatest form of praise is the sound of consecrated feet seeking out the lost and helpless." Rabbi Abraham Heschel once said, about participating in a Civil Rights march

with Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., "I felt as though my feet were praying." How might our hands and feet pray this day? Will they pray as you write a letter to an elected official calling for adequate safety nets for children in poverty, for just policies that give every child a fair start? Will your hands pray as you stock an emergency food pantry, or hold the hand of a child you are mentoring, or hammer a nail to repair a low-income family's home? Will your feet pray as you walk into a meeting with a legislator?

A Prayer to a Listening God

O God, we labor in the heat of the day,
and so often the labor feels hopeless, unproductive,
useless...
And yet, you hear our silent cries.
You give us one another
to speak that which we in our pain cannot speak.
You give us your Word
that utters those things we cannot find the words to say.
And not only do you give us the words to speak,
but you also turn your ear to us and hear us,
even when all we have strength to whisper is,
"Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer."

For you have promised to hear us.
You have promised to turn your face to shine upon us.
You have promised to be our shade
when the heat of the day saps our strength
and the well of hope runs dry.
And you have promised,
even in the silence,
to give us the sweet sound of peace.
—John McCullough Bade

From "A Prayer to a Listening God," in *Will I Sing Again? Listening for the Melody of Grace in the Silence of Illness and Loss* by John McCullough Bade (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2003, p. 46)

Sermon Notes on Micah 4:1-5:

Beating Swords Into Plowshares

⁴*In days to come
the mountain of the Lord's house
shall be established as the highest of the mountains,
and shall be raised up above the hills.
Peoples shall stream to it,
² and many nations shall come and say:
'Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord,
to the house of the God of Jacob;
that he may teach us his ways
and that we may walk in his paths.'
For out of Zion shall go forth instruction,
and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.*

³*He shall judge between many peoples,
and shall arbitrate between strong nations far away;
they shall beat their swords into ploughshares,
and their spears into pruning-hooks;
nation shall not lift up sword against nation,
neither shall they learn war any more;
⁴ but they shall all sit under their own vines and under their own fig trees,
and no one shall make them afraid;
for the mouth of the Lord of hosts has spoken.*

⁵*For all the peoples walk,
each in the name of its god,
but we will walk in the name of the Lord our God
for ever and ever.*

(Micah 4:1-5 NRSV)

Context of the Passage

Old Testament scholar Daniel J. Simundson offers this description of the context and concerns to which the eighth-century BCE prophet Micah spoke:

“The situation of ordinary citizens was of great concern to Micah. He felt compassion for the poor and dispossessed, and held the leaders responsible for their suffering. We can learn something about the people's social and economic situation from Micah's condemnation of their rulers, merchants, and prophets. Similar words from Micah's contemporary, Isaiah, add to our picture of a society where the rich and powerful used their influence to exploit the vulnerable and to create even greater inequalities of wealth and influence (e.g., Isaiah 5:8-10, 10:1-2). The economic situation of the poor was further aggravated by programs of armament and fortification in efforts to hold off the threat from foreign empires (see Chronicles 32).” (p. 534, *New Interpreters Bible Vol. VII*)

Our passage in Micah closely resembles a passage in Isaiah 2:2-4, although the substance of verse 4 in Micah does not appear in the Isaiah version. Many scholars believe the saying originated independently and then was incorporated into both.

W. Eugene March, in *The Harper Collins Bible Commentary*, summarizes the passage well:

“This well-known promise succinctly expresses a hope for universal peace with justice founded on the benevolent reign of the Lord. A Jerusalem based on bloody wrongdoing has no future. (3:9-12) God’s intention for a transforming peace will be realized for individuals and nations.

The promise includes four elements. Zion, the mount on which God’s house stands, will become preeminent in the latter days. (4:1) All nations will come in pilgrimage to this new center to receive divine instruction, *torah*, and divine adjudication of international disputes. (4:2-3) There will be worldwide peace, the dismantling of the machines of war, and the construction of implements of production. (4:3) Finally, all people will have the means and the security to both life to the fullest. (4:4)

But the prophet holds no illusions. The nations do not yet act in accordance with this expectation. Nonetheless God’s people affirm their intention to live on the basis of their hope in God’s promise. (4:5)” (p. 662)

Preaching Themes

The “war” at home

Over the past 50 years, three times more children and teens died from guns on American soil than U.S. soldiers were killed in action in wars abroad. Between 1963 and 2010, an estimated 160,000 children and teens died from guns on American soil, while 52,820 U.S. soldiers were killed in action in the Vietnam, Afghanistan, and Iraq wars combined.

In Micah’s day, the most devastating violence came at the hands of conquering nations, fueling a deep yearning and hope for a day when nation would not lift up sword against nation. In our day, for the past half-century in fact, the most deadly violence has been the killing of children and teens by guns here on American soil. How does this passage call us to envision, in new ways for our time, what peace will look like when every child, every teen, every family can live unafraid?

Plowshares: Not just peace, but plenty too

What will it look like for us to transform a culture of weapons and war into one of peace and plenty? Note that in the passage, the weapons aren’t simply thrown away but in fact are transformed into tools for economic well-being. It is not enough for us simply to end a culture of violence; we must positively focus our energy and resources on creating the means for every family to know economic security too. Instead of a war waged with weapons, what would it look like if we resumed and finally won the war on poverty? We know what works: good schools that prepare young people for college and work, job training, good jobs at decent wages, health care, and safety nets that protect children and families.

No one shall make them afraid

In this passage, security doesn’t come from stockpiling more weapons or demanding rights to have more powerful weapons; it is the move *away* from a culture of arms that provides the deep and lasting security that has filtered down from the national and international level all the way to the experience of individuals and families at home where no one is afraid.

In our time, more than one out of five American teenagers has witnessed a shooting. The 2008 National Survey of Children's Exposure to Violence found that more than one in five 14-17 year olds in a national representative survey of children had witnessed a shooting at some point in their lives. This number is thought to be much higher among low-income children; one study found that more than two out of five low-income Black school-aged children had witnessed a murder. Imagine the kind of fear that children are living with on a daily basis. When a young heart and mind are preoccupied with such life-or-death terror, how does a child focus on school work, or planning for the future, or nurturing relationships? When a parent is terrified of letting their young one out of the apartment into violent neighborhoods, what happens to good health and exercise and enriching experiences and interactions?

How can we begin to move away from a culture of violence that relies on weapons to resolve conflict? How can we create circumstances in which no one is afraid?

Mahatma Gandhi wrote, "If we are to teach real peace in this world and if we are to carry on a real war against war, we shall have to begin with children; and if they will grow up in their natural innocence, we won't have to struggle; we won't have to pass fruitless, idle resolutions, but we shall go from love to love and peace to peace, until at last all the corners of the world are covered with that peace and love for which, consciously or unconsciously, the whole world is hungering."

Keep on walking...

The final verse of our passage in Micah (v. 5) acknowledges the current reality that all peoples are not walking in God's path of peace and justice. Yet it ends with the affirmation that nonetheless we are called to keep walking in God's way toward that promised future—no matter how distant—of peace and economic security for all.

Daniel J. Simundson, reflecting in the *New Interpreter's Bible Vol. VII*, asks, "What is the relationship between realistic, earthly, achievable hopes and those that stretch our imagination beyond what humans have ever been able to accomplish?...Hostility and greed seem to exist as long as human beings live on the planet. Those who work to bring peace and security into this world, whether at the level of families, neighborhoods, or nations, have good reason to be discouraged and even to abandon their efforts. Are we to continue to work for goals that we know are not possible through purely human effort? Is Micah 4:1-5 a call to action, a reminder of our task and responsibility? Or is it something for which we can only wait patiently until God takes steps that are possible only for God? Or is it in some way a combination of both doing and waiting?" (p. 565)

Preachers who have selected Luke 18:1-8a for the New Testament text to accompany this Hebrew Scripture passage will hear one response to this question in Jesus' parable of the Widow and the Unjust Judge, which concludes "And will not God grant justice to God's chosen ones who cry to God day and night? Will God delay long in helping them? I tell you, God will quickly grant justice to them." (Luke 18:7-8a) Our relentless, persistent, unflagging, hopeful efforts to demand justice even in the face of discouragement is the precursor to God's activity. Micah affirms that we are to keep on walking the walk of peace and justice even if others have not yet fallen into step alongside us.

Becoming Instruments of Peace

The call to transform swords into plowshares invites us to imagine not only what it will take to transform instruments of death into instruments of life-sustaining income but also what it will take to transform our very lives into instruments of peace.

Read anew these words from the prayer attributed to St. Francis of Assisi, who renounced his personal claim on extravagant wealth to walk a path of solidarity with those in poverty and a path of peace:

Prayer of St. Francis

*Lord, make me an instrument of your peace,
Where there is hatred, let me sow love;
Where there is injury, pardon;
Where there is doubt, faith;
Where there is despair, hope;
Where there is darkness, light;
Where there is sadness, joy.*

*O Divine Master,
grant that I may not so much seek to be consoled, as to console;
to be understood, as to understand;
to be loved, as to love.
For it is in giving that we receive.
It is in pardoning that we are pardoned,
and it is in dying that we are born to Eternal Life.
Amen.*

Sample Children's Sermon/Time with Children

Swords and Shovels *Based on Micah 4:1-5*

For this time with children, you will want visual aids to represent a sword and a shovel. Options include bringing a toy plastic sword and a shovel (a child's plastic sand shovel or a garden trowel, for example), bringing poster-board drawings of each, or even making a sword out of clay which could then be refashioned into a shovel. Also bring a Bible with a bookmark at Micah 4.

Say, "Look! Here is a sword—real swords are weapons. And here is a shovel which can be used to plant yummy, healthy food."

[Open the Bible to where you have bookmarked Micah 4.] Say, "In this part of the Bible called the book of Micah, God's messenger Micah talks about turning all of the swords—which were used for fighting—into tools that could be used, like shovels, for planting food people need to be healthy and not hungry.

God doesn't want us to use weapons to hurt each other.

God wants us to help each other have what we need to be healthy and not hungry.

There are things grownups can do to stop the hurting and do more helping.

And there are things children can do to stop hurting and do more helping.

Of course, we don't want to hurt each other with our hands or weapons or anything else. Children can also be sure that they don't use *words* that hurt each other, right? No teasing or name-calling is one way to stop hurting. How else could you help other children not be hurt?

And there are things children can do to *help* others. We can share a snack or lunch with another child if they are hungry and don't have food. We can bring in cans of food to our church to be given to hungry families. If your family grows vegetables in a garden, maybe you will share some of that good food with families that need it. What else could you do to help others?

Thank you for those good ideas. Let's have a prayer.

Dear God,

Help us to remember that you don't want us to fight or hurt each other.

Show us how to help each other.

We pray for a time when no one is hurt or hungry and every child is healthy and safe. Amen.