



Ideas for Local Preachers' and Worship Leaders' Meetings

PREACHING PEACE AND JUSTICE – AN INTRODUCTION

Peace and justice lie at the very heart of the gospel message, as demonstrated in the life and teaching of Jesus. However, many of us as Worship Leaders and Local Preachers hesitate to tackle such issues as they are perceived to be political or controversial, or simply inappropriate to a setting of divine worship.

This session sets out to explore the centrality of issues of peace and justice to our faith and calling. It recognises that the values of the Kingdom of God are central to the message of salvation, and that scripture calls us to challenge injustice. It also recognises that the roots of Methodism lie in the expression of faith in the whole of Christian life, and that caring for those in poverty, for prisoners, for widows and orphans has always mattered a great deal and been at the centre of Methodist practice. Methodists remain at the heart of many projects tackling social issues in our communities.

This session¹ is intended to last about an hour and provides a variety of activities exploring why and how we can incorporate issues of peace and justice into our worship and preaching. Feel free to select the items that will work in your setting, remembering that suggested timings are only a guide. The material can be used as CLPD² in a Leaders of Worship and Preachers' Meeting or as part of a study day. The primary aim is that everyone should leave with at least one idea they want to try.

Outline

1. **What Matters to us?** - what are the issues that are on our minds? 10-15 mins
2. **What Matters to Jesus?** – how did Jesus set his priorities? 15 mins
3. **What's happening now?** – hearing the stories around us. 15 mins
4. **Passing it on** – how we embed peace and justice in our preaching and leading of worship? 15 mins
5. **Closing:** finish with Bible reading and quiet prayer and reflection. 10 mins

Note to facilitator:

- Issues of peace and justice often connect with strongly-held political convictions or cultural assumptions. Be aware that there may be a variety of views expressed, some of which may surprise you.
- Take care to ensure all who wish to speak have the opportunity, and avoid only dominant voices being heard.
- Remember that the purpose of discussion is not to resolve the issue, but to consider what an appropriate faith-based response as worship leaders and local preachers would be.

¹ By Richard Armiger and Bob Bartindale in consultation with the Joint Public Issues Team.

² Continuing Local Preacher Development.

1. WHAT MATTERS?

Choose one of the following three activities as an opener to the session:

Idea 1: What's in the news?

Take into account the context and the preferences of likely attendees and the kind of media they are likely to engage with.

Pass a selection of today's newspapers around, and/or encourage attendees to go online to access and browse news media. Encourage people to find one or more items that are about issues of justice / injustice and that either gives you joy or challenges you.

Five minutes

In groups of three, take turns to share what you've chosen and why. Explore any connections to your own faith and experience.

Five minutes

Idea 2: What's on my mind?

In groups of three:

- Take it in turns in the group to share a current issues that you are passionate about and why.
- Discuss how this relates to your own faith, understanding and experience.

If time, each group could then be asked to choose one of the issues they have discussed, and in two minutes, tell the whole group why it is so important.

Idea 3: Hot topics

Distribute copies of the Word Sheet to everyone.³

Encourage people to circle a word that challenges them.

In groups of three take turns to share what you've chosen and why and how it links to your own faith experience.



**10-15
mins**



Selection of
Newspapers
or access to
online news
media



Word sheet
for each
participant

2. WHAT MATTERS – TO JESUS?

Read Luke 4:16-21⁴, Luke's account of Jesus' sermon in the synagogue in Nazareth, sometimes called "Jesus' Manifesto":

¹⁶ *When he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, he went to the synagogue on the sabbath day, as was his custom. He stood up to*



15 mins

³ A Word Sheet is included at the back of this session plan.

⁴ From New Revised Standard Version.

read,¹⁷ and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written:

¹⁸ *'The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,*

because he has anointed me

to bring good news to the poor.

He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives

and recovery of sight to the blind,

to let the oppressed go free,

¹⁹ *to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour.'*

²⁰ *And he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him.* ²¹ *Then he began to say to them, 'Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.'*

You must be joking!

Use this dramatic dialogue which can be read from the following script:

Voice 1 represents Jesus, who should be seated, as if delivering his sermon in the synagogue.

Voice 2 represents the crowd, the synagogue congregation, who are listening intently, but become increasingly irate.

V1: *The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,*

V2: *There's certainly something about this man. He's got a presence about him. But he's got a nerve too. Great passage that Isaiah reading, we love that. And we're all looking forward to the Messiah coming. But surely he's not suggesting...*

V1: *... he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor.*

V2: *He's got our interests at heart too. A man of the people! We're always struggling to get by, he's not completely forgotten his roots. But hang on a minute... does he mean us? Or is he talking about those scroungers who hang about the rubbish dump, scavenging for scraps? They're poor, but that's because they don't work, don't help themselves! We're the deserving poor! We're flesh and blood. And charity begins at home, ... he did say that somewhere, didn't he? OK, perhaps not, but he should have!*

V1: *... he has sent me to proclaim release to the captives*

V2: *Captives? Who does he mean? It must be us, oppressed by the evil Roman Empire. They stole our country and take our taxes! But, you know, I'm not too sure. What if he means those who are in prison? The criminals waiting for execution? They deserve as*



Bibles, or
passage on
screen or
handouts



Two
volunteers,
two copies
of script

*good as they get! Surely he's not saying let them all out of jail?
We'd never be safe!*

V1: ... *sight to the blind ..*

V2: *Now he's suggesting he can heal blindness! He's lost the plot, the man is off his rocker. Everyone knows what causes blindness – it's your parents' sin! This is like claiming you can go back into the past and undo wrongs. Deluded, if you ask me.*

V1: ... *let the oppressed go free ...*

V2: *Now he's inciting revolution! This is getting too edgy. If the Romans find out, they'll be after us too. In fact, they've probably got their spies here. We need to get rid of this guy, he's a liability.*

V1: ... *proclaim the year of the Lord's favour*

V2: *Right, that's it. We've heard enough. Do us a favour, mate and get out of here. We'll give you a hand, to make sure you go. And since you think you've got all the answers, here's a cliff – show us how you can fly!*

Reflect

In groups of three or altogether, discuss one or more of these:

- How did that make you feel and why?
- Is this passage primarily about personal spiritual response to God, or about challenging injustice and relieving suffering?
- What relevance has this passage to conversations around issues of peace and justice today?
- Dietrich Bonhoeffer said⁵: “We are not to simply bandage the wounds of victims beneath the wheels of injustice, we are to drive a spoke into the wheel itself”. How do you feel about this view of the role of the church?

3. BRINGING IT UP-TO-DATE

Methodist Origins:

Whilst Methodism is often said to have been “born in song”, it's equally true that it was born out of concern for peace and justice. The Holy Club in Oxford was notable both for their disciplined lifestyle, but also for their regular visits to Oxford prison, caring for the condemned inmates. Later, inspired by their mother Susanna, John and Charles Wesley earned a reputation as pioneers in education.



15 mins

⁵ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison*.

Methodists were encouraged to work to their utmost to improve the lives of others. John Wesley exhorted them to "Make all you can, save all you can, give all you can."

John Wesley's last known letter urged the abolition of 'that execrable villainy' slavery.

Making the connections

Watch this video⁶ with personal stories from people who are making positive changes to their life thanks to the hospitality of the Bristol Methodist Centre:

<https://vimeo.com/374135919>

If video is not possible, download this "Stories" document, which includes five stories from people who have used the Bristol Methodist Centre:

<https://www.methodist.org.uk/media/14688/stories-bristol-methodist-centre.pdf>

In groups of three, discuss:

- **From what you have seen or heard, how does this project relate to Jesus' sermon in Luke 4?**

If there is time, reflect together on your conclusions.



Video & projection
OR
"Stories"
document
and
volunteers

4. PREACHING PEACE AND JUSTICE

Return to Luke 4:16-21 and in groups of three, write down some key words to describe:

- What would Luke's readers have understood from this passage?
- Is this passage primarily about personal spiritual response to God, or about challenging injustice and relieving suffering?
- What does it mean in your community right now?
- If you were preaching on this text or leading worship based around this text, what would you want to communicate?

If time allows ask each group to share the three perspectives in their outline and briefly explain why they've chosen them. (limit sharing to 1 minute and time if required)



15 mins



Paper & pens

5. CLOSING

Summing up the session, you may like to mention:



10 mins

⁶ The video can be watched online, or downloaded from the Vimeo website by clicking the "download" button below the video window.

- The theme of peace and justice is inseparable from the gospel. It lies at the heart of Jesus' teaching and his life amongst the poor and marginalized.
- God's Peace and justice is central to the biblical narrative. In the Old Testament, especially in the prophets. Acts, Paul. Peace and Justice is universal – its where Jesus started – it embraces all of human life and God's compassion. It is too important to be ignored.
- The Methodist tradition was founded on a desire to live out our faith through practical action
- Wherever Christians seek to be faithful to God's call, they find themselves involved with peace and justice in different ways. Perhaps there are those in your local congregation who could be asked to share their stories?

The Voice of the Prophet

Read Micah 6:6-8 slowly, allow two minutes for quiet reflection and then read it again⁷:

⁶ *'With what shall I come before the LORD,
and bow myself before God on high?
Shall I come before him with burnt-offerings,
with calves a year old?
⁷ Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams,
with tens of thousands of rivers of oil?
Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression,
the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?'*
⁸ *He has told you, O mortal, what is good;
and what does the LORD require of you
but to do justice, and to love kindness,
and to walk humbly with your God?*

Sending Prayer⁸

So now, God of justice, we must go.
We must live to feed the hungry.
We must stand beside the broken.
We must go.
We trust you to go with us,
turning our songs into actions,
for the sake of your world,
for the sake of your Son,
and in the power of your Spirit.
Amen.

⁷ Micah 6:6-8, New Revised Standard Version, Anglicised.

⁸ From the Methodist Church Advent Offering 2019 resources, inspired by Singing the Faith 699.

Inequality	Exploitation	Refugees	Pollution	Hate Crime
Sexism	Poverty	Climate change	Low Pay	Cruelty to animals
Injustice	Loneliness	Slavery	#MeToo	Executive pay
Racism	Hunger	Famine	Trafficking	Discrimination



Notes