



On your marks

On the Sunday nearest to 11 November, most churches hold a Service of Remembrance, marking the day when the First World War ended. Today we also remember all those who have lost their lives fighting in subsequent wars and a two-minute silence is kept at 11.00am. The service is also an opportunity to explore themes of peace, sacrifice and remembering, and as such has a lot of important things for children to learn and experience. Although you may shy away from including children in all of this service, the following ideas are offered to make it more possible for them to enter as fully as possible into the great themes of this day's worship.

Get set

The focus point for this service for all ages is stones - so often a symbol of remembrance in The Old Testament and, in themselves, rich in other associations, too, with links to the mercy that God promises to remember whenever God looks upon his people.

You will need to collect together a number of large stones (if possible a variety of colours and shapes) and at various points of the service arrange to have them put on display so that everyone can see them.

You will also need baskets of small stones and smooth stones; some confetti hearts; a large bowl of water; objects linked to remembering (see point 1 below).

There are some suggestions for songs/hymns from *Mission Praise*.

Go!

1. Set the theme of the service by showing a tray with various objects, which are all linked to remembrance, including: a picture of an elephant (or maybe a large toy elephant?), a knotted handkerchief, post-it note, a photo album, a diary. And then add a poppy to this tray.
2. In our service of worship we will be picking up on this theme of remembering:

remembering the terrible cost of war

remembering those who still suffer or grieve

remembering the price that some paid

But also remembering God's love; the sacrifice of Jesus; and our belonging to each other now through Christ.

To do that we will also reflect on what God remembers and what God does not remember. I wonder what that can be?



3. Remembering is an interesting word. It is literally made up of two parts: re- and -member, so in some one sense it is the opposite of dis-member. In other words, remembering is becoming part of something again, being put back together, being brought into wholeness.

This is what we do each time we gather for worship. We are members of the body of Christ and are re-membering – coming back together, to discover more of what it means to follow Jesus together and discover more of Jesus here among us as we worship.

4. Have a moment of quiet:

Here are words from the Psalm 105 which urge us to remember several times: read verses 1-8.

5. Sing together: 'I will enter his gates with thanksgiving in my heart' (*Mission Praise* 307).

Light a candle: 'The Lord is here, and his Spirit is with us.'

6. Linked to the theme of remembrance is the symbol of stones.

Show some of the stones you have gathered for this service. You might like to invite some people up to handle the stones and tell the congregation what each feels like and what stones mean to them. Many of us have collections of stones in our homes from important moments and places in our lives.

Stones are used in a variety of ways in the Bible. They are a handy, natural visual aid in what was a mountainous part of the world that bordered the stony desert. Even in our part of the world, we use stones in different ways:

There are stone cairns up in the Lake District to mark the summit of a mountain or the path we should take. We used to rely on milestones in the past before the days of satellite navigation (though perhaps we should return to using them!) We have gravestones to mark a burial place, or maybe you have stones making up a rockery in your garden. We also talk of stones in a more uncomfortable way. We may get a small one stuck in our shoe for example, which spoils a walk and becomes a nuisance. In this way stones are like the sin that spoil our walk with God. They are the stones of sin, which refuses to give to others the love they deserve, or they may be our experience of being refused the care we need.

From baskets of small stones placed around your worship area, invite people to take one.

7. Think of the ways in which we have failed to remember God this week, or even today. Now we come to God with a genuine 'sorry'.

Use a form of confession that your all-age congregation is used to.

And listen to what God remembers and what he forgets.

Read Habbakuk 3:2 and Jeremiah 31:33-34.



Invite people to come and put their stone into a large bowl of water and sprinkle some little confetti hearts that will float on the surface above.

Because of the cross, God remembers us - he puts us back together again.

Because of the cross, God does not remember our past sins (does not keep a record to bring up against us).

Sing: 'Father in heaven how we love you' (*Mission Praise* 135).

8. A time to remember (leading up to the 11:00am silence).

Ideas of things to say beforehand:

Wars are still going on.

Peace is not just the opposite of war; it is meant to be a way of life.

We can use this moment to remember what was; to remember what is now; to remember not to go on choosing the way of war again.

(Ironically, some of the largest poppy fields in the world today are found at the very heart of the fighting in Afghanistan.)

If there is time, invite mention of particular war-torn parts of the world today that people wish to remember.

After the silence and the usual words of remembrance, use the following reading: Isaiah 2:2-5.

Sing: 'A new commandment I give unto you' (*Mission Praise* 1).

9. A reading from Joshua 4:19-24 - stones to remember God's power.

Stones are used to build altars in the Bible to remember God's presence. And stones are used to build memorials to remember God's power.

Have available some larger stones.

Invite people to share things about what God has done and about the things that we want to remember before God, for example items for prayer and praise and thanksgiving. As you pray together, build an altar from twelve stones in a prominent place.

Sing together: 'Teach me to live, day by day' (*Mission Praise* 627).

10. Stones are amazing things.



When we touch them we are touching something that belongs to our pre-history. We are linking up with the big picture of God's purposes for the universe and in a way we step out of this time into the realm of God's time and eternity.

This stone has only ended up as the stone in our hands after thousands of years of events, which God set in motion. Stones can in this way remind us of our smallness; but they also can be a way of reminding us of our specialness.

Have a big basket of smooth stones.

Invite everyone to take one and enjoy and explore their stone. Get to know the stone.

Will they be able to recognize that stone again?

Put them back in the basket and muddle them all up.

Invite some to find out their stone again.

Link this to God's amazing love for us individually. We are precious stones to him.

God can always find us... God knows us through and through.

Link to David's experience from Psalm 139.

N.B. There is simple child-friendly version of part of this psalm on our website: [An easy-to-learn Psalm](#).

11. A possible outline for a short reflection (part 1):

Stones are often special to us. Do you collect stones?

Recently on a quiet day, I set off to Bradwell-on-Sea to visit the chapel right on the edge of Essex where St Cedd set up his first missionary base when he came to evangelize the heathen of Essex! In the chapel there is an altar and in it are imbedded three stones. They link that place to other places where God has worked in people's lives: one from Iona; one from Lindisfarne; one from a place call Lastingham in Yorkshire. Stones can link us and remind us of God's work in our lives.

Stones are special to people in the Bible, too.

Samuel set up a stone called Ebenezer to remember that God had helped them in times of trouble (1 Samuel 7:12-13).

David experienced God's help again and again among the stones of the desert at the Rock of Escape or the Rock of Refuge and it becomes an often repeated image in the Psalms (1 Samuel 23:25-28 and Psalm 18:2).



I wonder what stones – real or literal – from your story of faith you’ve kept to remind you of special times? We need those stones to hold on to when we come to more difficult times and face unanswered prayer or unrelieved pain. Stones can be a reminder of God’s protection in the past and help us to have faith now in the present.

12. The most famous Bible stone of all is the one Jesus points us to, when he called himself ‘the rejected stone’ – the stone the builders rejected.

A second (New Testament) reading at this point could be: Matthew 21:42-46.

Put down a single, large rock in a prominent place.

13. Idea for a short reflection (part 2)

Among all the stones lying around outside the temple, which was still being built at the time of Jesus (and near the time of his death). Perhaps Jesus spotted one stone that the builders didn’t want. Perhaps it was too dirty or rough. Perhaps it looked unsafe or unpromising in some way.

However, Jesus picked it up and said that this stone, which had been rejected, would become the head of the corner.

It would become the most important stone of all.

It would become the one that held everything else together – the capstone, the keystone.

This is exactly what happened, of course. It was a prediction of his own death and resurrection. God’s purposes were to take a surprising and unexpected turn for the people of Israel. And things can be the same for us. We can feel like that rejected stone. We can feel that we are not promising, useful or special. But God has a special place for us. He has work for us to do that only we can do. If we follow the way of Jesus, then we, too, are rejected stones that become vital stones in God’s work in this world.

In fact, Peter never forgot that story and in his first letter picked up the image when he wrote to the Christians who felt rejected and despised and ignored (1 Peter 2:4-8).

He calls them ‘living stones’ being built into a special place that would show God’s glory in this world. This is always God’s way and it’s true for us here in this place.

Invite everyone to collect one the stones from the water (under the hearts) and then create a circle of those stones, now symbolically cleaned and washed by the work of the cross, on another prominent focal point. At this point, make space for a time to pray for all those who feel rejected, forgotten, damaged or lost. Draw the prayers together by using the Lord’s Prayer.

14. And that’s not quite the end, because there is also the mysterious ‘white stone’ waiting for us in heaven. Listen:



'To him who overcomes I will give some of the hidden manner. I will also give him a white stone with a new name written on it, known only to him who receives it' Revelation 2:17 (NIV).

God is remaking us and making us ready to be welcomed into heaven one day. The white stone means many things: maybe it's the sign that we are not guilty; maybe it's a symbol of our reward; maybe it means 'the real true me' that God will have made perfect on that day. Only we know what it means for us.

Encourage everyone to look back at the different stones from the service and to think about the ones that have meant something special for them today.

I wonder which of these stones stories you like the best? I wonder which of the stone stories is the most important for you? I wonder where you are among all the stones today and for this coming week? I wonder what God is reminding you of on this Remembrance Day?

15. As we end our service, listen again to what God remembers and what God forgets on this Remembrance Sunday:

Isaiah 44:21-23

Sing together: 'Hallelujah, sing to Jesus' (*Mission Praise* 207).