

Session 2: Second week of lent:

Education and Youth

*"I will dwell in your tent forever.
I will take refuge in the shelter of your wings" (Psalm 61:4).*

Worship

Responses

Make way for the one who comes in the name of the Lord!
whose kingdom understands the greatness of the small.

What does the Lord require of us?

To do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with our God.

Be strong and bold; have no fear or dread,

because it is the Lord your God who goes with you; God will not fail you or forsake you.

What does the Lord require of us?

To do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with our God.

Voices of Lament and Hope

Voice 1: Christ looks over the city today and laments.
"Would that there be peace in the city,
that the children would be safe
and the old men find a tree under which to sit and watch the world go by.
I long to gather you to myself."

Voice 2: But, see, look, there in the play group, laughter and learning,
there in the park, folk playing bowls,
there in the market the young man helps the old woman with her bags.

All: **We are the peace Christ longs for.**

Voice 1: Christ looks over the city today and laments.
"Would that there be peace in the city,
Where is there justice for the poor and the widow?
Where does the stranger find solace today?
I long to gather you to myself."

Voice 2: But, see, look, there in the courtroom someone is listening,
there in the food bank a parcel is made;
there in the church a bed for the homeless guest,
there is a place for the refugee to be safe.

All: **We are the peace Christ longs for.**

Voice 1: Christ looks over the city today and laments.
“Would that there be peace in the city,
that the followers of faith might sit together,
that the powerful might listen to the voices of hope.
I long to gather you to myself.”

Voice 2: But, see, look, there in the mosque, mandir and ghudwara,
in synagogue, temple, cathedral and hall
people of all faiths are meeting, learning and longing.
People of all faiths and no faith and faltering faith are writing,
voting, and challenging leaders and monarchs, presidents and powers.

All: **We are the peace Christ longs for.**

Voice 1: May Christ gather us all under the wings of his nurturing love
and help us to bring about his peace in our hearts and in all creation.

Prayer:

Gracious God,
Creator of all,

We remember today how Jesus, your Son, wept over Jerusalem and longed for its
peace. Help us to be those who act as Christ today, gathering together those who are
broken and needing peace. Help us to celebrate the contribution of children and
young people in church and in society, learning to listen to their wisdom and to create
a safe space in which they can grow, learn and be themselves.

In Christ's name.

Amen.

Scripture reading

Luke 13: 31-35

Reflect:

Pause for a moment to reflect upon your own childhood. What feelings and
memories does it evoke? What were the biggest challenges you faced in your
teenage years?

Some Thoughts and Background

There is a strong and natural human desire to feel secure and loved. It is equal to the desire to protect and hold in love those closest to us. Yet one of the defining characteristics of youth is the need to push against those very same boundaries that offer security. In fact, it could be said that it is in the pushing of those boundaries that maturity emerges and growth takes place. For those who are responsible for nurturing children and young people, there comes the point of needing to let go and standing back to allow them to find independence and experience life on their own. Yet many parents say that the feeling of wanting to protect their offspring never goes away.

In different cultures and at different times in history children and young people have been viewed - and expected to behave as a result of that view - in different ways. This is also true for the Church. The view that children should be seen and not heard seems outdated now yet has it really disappeared altogether? Is there a tendency to long for more children and young people in church yet to not really be prepared for what that might mean. The cry of 'we must do something for the children, they are the church of the future!' seems to miss the point that children are part of the church TODAY and need to be valued as such! In Matthew's gospel (Chapter 19:14) Jesus teaches the disciples that children and young people are to be valued as well as older people. Of course young people have much to learn, but learning is a lifelong activity, and lack of knowledge cannot be held up as a sign of inferiority, insignificance, or ignorance. Earlier in Matthew's gospel Jesus uses a child as an example of how to enter the Kingdom of God. There can be little doubt that children and young people occupy a central place in God's world view.

But even in valuing children and young people as God teaches, there will still be a yearning to gather and protect them under the wings of love! Especially when we see the sort of world that young people are growing up in today. The pressure from an early age, placed on them through the education system, to perform and prove themselves. The social, media and peer pressures to behave, dress and think in certain ways. The culture of gangs, bullying and violence which has a hold on many young men and women and poses an ever present threat.

When young people conform not to positive expectations but to negative ones, it can be easy to engage in some proverbial hand wringing and cry out a lament to the wicked world! Yet Jesus' lament over Jerusalem ends with these tender words 'how often I have desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wing'. The example is clear and is the central theme of the scripture, that no matter how many times someone walks away, God waits for their return, offering an unconditional love. The love of a parent, when it is at its best, is often compared to the love of God. Many parents will speak of holding their child with an unconditional love. It is the safety offered by that unconditional love that allows young people to take risks, knowing that they will be accepted and cherished even if things go wrong. It is from within that embrace of unconditional love that they develop self-esteem and learn to love others. Yet many young people today are growing up without that embrace. Positive role models are absent and a lack of hope in the possibility of a meaningful future leads some to seek fulfilment in destructive relationships and patterns of behaviour.

London Education and Youth Stats

Between 1999/2000 and 2010/11, the percentage of London pupils obtaining at least five GCSE A*-C grades increased from 45 to 81 per cent

Children in London are more likely to reach required levels of educational at ages 11, 16 and 19 than children in the rest of England -

Within London 65.1 per cent of children got 5 or more A*- C at GCSE, inc English and Maths, as compared to 59.2% nationally

4.5 per cent of 14-18 year olds in London are recorded as not in employment, education or training (NEET) in London. This is compared to 6.1 per cent nationally

London attracts students from other parts of the country and is a magnet for students from abroad. In 2009/10 almost 100,000 London students came from outside the UK. International students comprise 24 per cent of all students in London, compared with 16 per cent in the UK

London is home to 43 universities - the largest concentration of higher education in Europe

One third of London families did not manage to get their child into their first choice school in 2011 which is double the proportion in the rest of the country

Over 26,000 young people in London aged under 18 are estimated to be carers for an ill or disabled relative for 20-50 hours a week or more, which can have a major impact on their education

London's population is younger than in the rest of the UK, nearly two thirds (63 per cent) of Londoners are aged under 44, compared to just over half (53 per cent) in the UK as a whole. 24.5% of London's population is made up of people aged 19 or under

In inner London pupils whose first language is not English is 50 per cent as compared to 35 per cent in outer London

Seven out of 10 local authorities with the highest proportions of pre-school (0-4 years) children nationally are in London. Barking and Dagenham has the highest proportion at 10.1 per cent, followed by Slough (9.1 per cent), Newham, Greenwich, and Luton (each 8.2 per cent) and Waltham Forest (8.1 per cent)

Discuss:

- Do you find it easy or difficult to relate to children and teenagers and why? Share your experiences.
- For some young people the parental relationship is not a source of love and nurture, but rather neglect and disinterest. What are the implications of this?
- What are the 'protective wings' which should be offered to a young person and whose responsibility is it to offer them?
- How should we respond to a young person who does not appear to be willing to be gathered under those protective wings?
- How as a church can we listen more effectively to young people?
- What would be the most significant changes that could be made in society to improve the lives of young people today?

And finally.....

What specific stories, experiences or points relating to young people would you like to bring to the attention of the Mayoral candidates?