



Churches
in Ireland
Connecting
in Christ



30 years of peace?

School Assembly for Secondary Level

(Bible Reading John 8:2-11)

(Show slide 1)



- This picture was taken 30 years ago in Northern Ireland (used with permission from the photographer Crispin Rodwell)
- It was a significant time in our country's history:
- On 31st August 1994, the Irish Republican Army declared a complete cessation of military operations from midnight onwards
- In October of the same year, the Combined Loyalist Military Command made a statement saying they would cease military operations.
- After over 25 years of the Troubles, and over 3000 deaths, these statements were very welcome
- The language in the ceasefires spoke of their intention to stop fighting and look for a 'just settlement' instead, as part of a 'true peace'.
- When Martin Luther King Jr worked for peace and a just society in America, he said that 'true peace is not merely the absence of tension: it is the presence of justice'.
- Justice works when you love the people around you enough to consider their needs as much as your own – otherwise justice becomes self-serving:
- 30 years on ... has true peace come?
- You may not have been around when these ceasefires were announced but if a peaceful world is one where there is justice; where everyone is treated

fairly, where there is no violence, no fear, no hatred ... there might still be some work to do:

- This Summer, people have taken justice into their own hands by organizing protest riots against our Muslim neighbours.

(Show slide 2)



- (used with permission from the artist Maurice Pierse)
- One culture tried to decide the fate of another culture –
- This can't be justice because it is not meted out fairly.
- Someone who came to bring true justice amongst cultures was Jesus.
- Jesus spoke Aramaic, Latin and Greek so he was caught between many cultures.
- In the story that we read, Jewish leaders wanted Jesus to punish a woman who had committed adultery
- His Jewish upbringing told him that it would have been fine to throw stones and kill someone who had hurt others through her sin.
- However, Jesus was living in the Roman world – and the only people who could make death penalty judgments were the Romans.
- If he followed his own crowd, he would have been breaking Roman law.
- If he followed Roman law, he would have betrayed his own people's sense of justice.
- So, what does he do?
- He stoops down and writes in the sand – something his heavenly Father did when he wrote on the tablets of the ten commandments.
- Jesus tells the astonished crowd:
- 'Let any of you who is without sin be the one to throw the first stone'.
- Jesus' response is brilliant because he does not minimize sin or our potential to hurt our neighbours – but he shows how everyone must be held to the same standard ...
- Our laws can't just be for our own people – they must benefit everyone in society.
- Jesus, as God's own son, had every right to judge and throw the first stone ... but he didn't.

- Instead, he shows mercy
- Mercy which offers the woman an opportunity to experience freedom
- Mercy which allows the leaders to re-evaluate their own justice systems
- Mercy which leads with love rather than fear
- Jesus offers mercy and new life free from the law of sin and death.
- 30 years on from these ceasefires, the challenge is that many of these organisations from the Troubles continue to exist in some shape or form.
- This kind of justice operates on fear rather than love:

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- (used with permission from the artist Maurice Pierse)
- As you start a school year consider what justice means to you:
- Who do you naturally gravitate towards at break and lunchtime:
- Is it people who you know will agree with you or will you show a love that is willing to listen to others and show welcome?
- When you judge others for their words or actions, first think of your own bias.
- It's too easy to think the worst of others and the best of yourself.
- How might you reverse this and consider others as better?
- Martin Luther King Jr also said, 'peace is not merely a distant goal we seek, but a means by which we arrive at that goal'. If we want peace, we need to be peaceful. If we want justice, we need to treat each other justly.
- When Jesus was arrested on the night of his betrayal, he went freely without having to be forced and challenged Peter for choosing the sword.
- In our news, young people are choosing the sword to protect themselves on the streets ... You have the important role of choosing another way.
- Mercy that covers mess
- Grace that melts greed
- Peace that lasts forever
- Jesus said those who are peacemakers are children of God. This year, choose this better way

Prayers

God of justice: You inspire us to always seek the path of truth, mercy and peace
Forgive us when we have ignored the cries of the vulnerable
Forgive us when we protect people who think like us and forget the needs of others
Give us grace to be able to think of others better
Give us compassion to understand those in pain
Show us how to be peacemakers so that our schools and communities are safe places for all, in Jesus' name we pray, amen.

Or

Pax Christi Daily Prayer

Thank you loving God for the gift of life,
For this wonderful world we all share,
For the joy of love and friendship,
For the challenge of helping to build your kingdom.

Strengthen my determination to work for a world of peace and justice,
My conviction that, whatever our nationality or race, we are all global citizens, one in Christ;
My courage to challenge the powerful with the values of the Gospel, my commitment to find nonviolent ways of resolving conflict – personal, local, national and international, my efforts to forgive injuries and to love those I find it hard to love.

Teach me to share the gifts you have given me, to speak out for the victims of injustice who have no voice, to reject the violence which runs through much of our world today.
Holy Spirit of God, renew my hope for a world free from the cruelty and evil of war, so that we may all come to share in God's peace and justice. Amen.