

‘Steps towards Reconciliation’: a monologue interspersed with words and music

How are we to mark the end of a War in which so many lives were lost and damaged? We will certainly remember, but we must also commit ourselves afresh to working together for peace. Reconciliation requires an honest ‘truth telling’, and the text that follows seeks to respect the fact that we may only be able to take steps towards that goal.

The piece identifies seven steps:

1. The need to remember and to look back honestly
2. The voicing of regret and loss
3. Recognising the humanity of the other, the enemy
4. The need first to change one’s viewpoint
5. Accepting our differences
6. Agreeing to walk together
7. Sharing a vision

Each of the ‘steps’ is linked together with an imagined monologue, in which a British soldier is speaking to his opposite number in the German army. The monologue is the connecting link between each step, and the whole piece is interspersed with suggestions for readings, biblical and non-biblical, and music. The suggestions given here are not exhaustive.

2018 marks the end of the War that was supposed to end all wars. Today, of course, many of the scars and divisions we suffer are the result not of conventional warfare, but of the cruel and destructive violence of global terrorism. Even now, amongst continuing conflicts and fragile peace, we need the words to express the hope of Christ’s peaceable kingdom, as well as the imagination and resilience to go on, and on, praying for peace and working for reconciliation.

‘Steps towards Reconciliation’ will need to be adapted to local circumstances. It does not need to happen in a church setting. It could be ‘staged’ in a school or college, or perhaps an assembly, or by a community group in a suitable public space. It is hoped that those staging the event may well have their own suggestions about readings and music, and the aim is for it to be a community exercise.

Welcome and an Opening Prayer

I. The first step: the need to remember and to look back honestly.

Monologue: ‘The petals fall and we walk away...But if there is to be any reconciliation, then we must circle back, return to that place where the mud clung to our boots and we shivered, afraid, with enemy fire deafening our ears. We had each other in our sights, you and me, and we cursed to mask the stench of death as we lobbed the grenades and canisters of gas. I could not, would not, picture your face. But, yes, I knew, alright. I’d seen the wounds, raw and bloody red.’

Reading: Wilfrid Owen, *Strange Meeting*

2. The second step: lament – the voicing of regret and loss

Monologue: ‘There will be a time, a little distant from now, before the memory totally fades, when we must face the ugliness and disfiguring brutality of war. ‘Oh God!’ we cry, but the sound of our voice is lost in an empty sky.... But evil will be faced, words will wither on the tongue, and we will feel a silent scream deep inside. Such waste, such horror! ‘How did this happen! Why, oh, just why was it allowed to go on and on in its industrial madness – shattering the landscape, razing the town to rubble, and cruelly tossing broken lives aside. The silent cry is irrepressible, and we search here and there for words to voice our complaint: “How lonely sits the city...How like a widow she has become...She weeps bitterly in the night, with tears on her cheeks; Jerusalem is a wilderness....Arise, cry out...Pour out your heart like water before the presence of the Lord.”’
(*Lamentations*, words from Chapter 1 and 2)

Anthem: *Drop, drop, slow tears* by W. Walton.

3. The third step: recognising the humanity of the enemy

Monologue: ‘Is it possible for us to meet? Do we have the courage to face each other, to look each other in the eye...Can we meet, as those twins who were enemies from the days when they were in the womb? Can we recognise our kinship, the bond of our shared humanity? With trepidation we take a step towards each other, not knowing what resentments, what recrimination remain in the dying embers of the residual guilt, the anger and the hurt that linger in our hearts. Like Jacob, we walk towards our brother, not knowing just how it will be when we meet. But we will meet, and when we do I will see myself in you, and you will see yourself in me.’

Biblical Reading: Genesis 33.1–end

4. The fourth step: the first resolve, ‘we must change’

Monologue: ‘This is the imperative of remembrance, the outcome of honestly facing our former enemy. We might protest, and say that it is for them to change. But it isn’t just *them*. It’s too easy to speak of us and them, to pass the buck and to duck our responsibility. We can’t just load the guilt onto someone else. No, honesty makes its demands. And if I truly recognise myself in you, and you can see yourself in me, then we must *both* change. For Christ’s sake, I say, I should no longer see, or feel, or think in the way that I did. If I could, just for a moment, see things as you see them, then perhaps, and only perhaps, I could come to act differently.’

A musical interlude – a recording of Samuel Barber’s *Adagio for Strings*

Biblical Reading: 2 Corinthians 5.16–20

5. The fifth step: accepting our differences

Monologue: 'There is much we share, but in the end, you are not me, and I am not you. This much I now see. So how should I respond? My first word has to be 'sorry'. But it's such a heavy, weighted word. It rolls so effortlessly off the tongue, but what a freight of meaning it has to carry! How can it be said? The word just carries too much. But perhaps if we were both to say it, and say it together, then perhaps the word will be heard, the apology will be spoken, received and reciprocated. 'I am sorry, so sorry', we cry, 'sorry for it all.' There! It is said, and by being sincerely said, the crushing weight is lifted, and we can start to move on.'

Music: *Pack up your troubles in your old kitbag*

6. The sixth step: resolving to walk together

Monologue: 'You promised to help me, and now I must reciprocate... there will be tasks to share, but first let's share the stories. Tell me again, where were you from? Where, again, was home for you? Where would you like to travel now? Could we, you and I, journey together, could we keep our feet in step and step out together? Let this be our resolve.'

Hymn: *Through the night of doubt and sorrow, or some other suitable music*

7. The shared vision: 'a new heaven and a new earth.'

Monologue: 'In what you said I heard another voice, and what I tried to say in a faltering way was to give voice to that other voice. The voice calling us to see. "Open your eyes, cries the voice, open your eyes to see who you could be; open your eyes to see what the world could be. Look out and see, look out and see a world rightly ordered by the mercy, the peace and justice of the eternal Word. The Word that was in the beginning, and that Word that, in the end, will call us home together.'

Biblical Reading: verses from 2 Peter 3 and Revelation 21 concerning 'a new heaven and a new earth'.

Concluding Song: *Jerusalem (words by William Blake)*