

**'Santo, santo, santo'**

### **Call to worship**

In these extraordinary days; surrounded by an atmosphere of anxiety, conscious of our own worries and bearing the worries of others, we come into the presence of God, promised in the life, ministry, death and rising again of Jesus Christ - by whose name and in the power of the Holy Spirit, we worship

### **BPW 529 'The Servant King'**

#### **Opening prayer**

Lord God, unchanging through the ages, unmoved by the waxing and waning of creation, untouched by the things that come close to our lives, yet changed by the suffering of Christ; moved by the death of your own Son and touched by the human world in all its pain and confusion, with all its hopes and nightmares – changed because love always changes – and your Love is eternal; moved because love always moves – and your Love is unending – touched because love always touches – and your Love is beyond compare;

Lord God, in Christ you have made us; by Christ you have saved us, through Christ you keep us and lead us on –

In this hurting, confused, suffering, dangerous world, we come before you; in anxious, conflicted, difficult lives we crave your presence, in a hope we do not always feel, with a faith we do not always confess; out of belief we sometimes struggle to hold, we gather in our hearts; we reach out to one another despite our distance and we worship you as one despite our forced separation.

We worship you for you are greater than all things; Lord of all, maker of all things, Ruler of all, reconciler of all things; Keeper of all

We seek forgiveness, we crave your love, we depend on your peace & justice; we would follow Christ; we would dwell in Your Spirit, we would hope in your Kingdom;

We come before you in Christ's name – and we wait on your word –

Christ says, 'Do not be afraid, for I have overcome the world'

#### **Lord's Prayer:**

*Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us. Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours, now and forever. Amen*

### **CG1 'A touching place'**

#### **The Grace is said:**

*The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all, evermore, Amen.*

**Reading**      John 19.25-27

## Sermon

I hardly need to say much about the current crisis itself - save only that it really is unprecedented for churches to close their worship services. Tyndale did not close even after the building was bombed - witness the photographs of baptisms taking place in the ruins.

But now there is no alternative. The central feature of the Christian faith in the world is its regular weekly worship; now, *everywhere*, churches large and small are shutting down.

That's not quite true, though; already online worship was well established; now it's taking off - we at Tyndale are joining the many churches that are broadcasting worship services live or recorded. Welcome, anyone and everyone who finds their way to the Tyndale website and joins us as we pray and reflect on just what it means to worship God and live by faith in such unprecedented times.

On *Mothering Sunday*. On a day that's traditionally been for gathering in families to celebrate togetherness at home and church we have to find ways of celebrating even though we are scattered physically. But then, often people will have been prevented, on this day, because of distance, work or circumstance, from being together.

And it's Lent. The Christian story moves towards its tragic climax. Brokenness moves centre stage. Disciples fall away; betrayal fills the air; political upheaval stalks the land. Yes, the coronavirus situation is terrible, unprecedented - the whole world is in turmoil; our lives are broken, but Christian faith was born in, *was made for*, such a time.

It all comes into focus at the foot of the cross. Those few verses in John's gospel - Mary the *mother* of Jesus at the foot of the cross. Probably she wouldn't have been allowed to stand *that* close - crucifixion was a brutal, military operation; I imagine that onlookers would be held back behind barriers - though maybe a few, especially women, who were expected at such times to mourn and wail, would have been allowed through..

Whatever; imagine Mary, Jesus's mother - and another Mary? & another woman or two? It's not certain, depends how you read it. But sure enough the mother of Jesus was there with others - imagine them there, with 'the disciple Jesus loved' - the only one left of all the disciples... brutality, betrayal, brokenness -

And in the midst of it all, Jesus on the Cross. Look, I'm not here to pretend that any of this is easy; I'm not here to pretend, on Mothering Sunday, that there's an easy religious way through all this - that we've only got to say our prayers or do familiar religious things and we'll all be OK -

And I shy away from grand pronouncements such as 'God's plan' - I find it quite irritating when someone says 'you've just got to discover God's plan for your life' - while children are being maimed by bombs, families are being rendered homeless by earthquakes - and people all over are having to cope with anxiety, the loss of livelihood, illness, death and bereavement, the confounded nuisance of self-isolation, worries about looking after children, elderly relatives, neighbours, through this coronavirus crisis.

It makes no *religious* sense, no *Christian* sense, no *human* sense at all; and by the way neither does it make much sense to trust in the benign force of nature. For better or worse we are part of the natural world; we are subject to its wiles (including viruses) and it is only by the hard work of scientists and technologists - as well as health workers, supermarket shelf stackers, sewage workers, factory workers, builders, financial experts, teachers and carers, entertainers, journalists - you name it -

That we have a chance of coming through this and taking up some kind of normal existence again.

The mother of Jesus at the foot of the cross, then. 'God's plan' was taking place right before her eyes, and it involved terrible suffering, untold grief - brutality, betrayal, brokenness. I don't imagine that Mary felt any of this was part of any plan she had ever envisaged for herself, for her son, for her country..

God's plan..but maybe we *can* say that Jesus believed his suffering and death was part of God's plan. Jesus in John's gospel seems to go through the whole thing with calmness and serenity. There's no dwelling on the gory details; no 'bigging up' of the brutality of it all; none of the 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?' crying of Matthew & Mark,; none of the 'Father into your hands I commit my spirit' (through gritted teeth, I always think) of Luke.

Just 'it is finished!' - Jesus dying words. In purely human terms such words are what you might expect of someone who has struggled for hours to breathe, as pain mounts and death hoves into view. Never mind Dylan Thomas's 'rage, rage against the dying of the light' - the rage, the struggle to live, is over...'it is finished'

But John's gospel is more profound yet; his portrayal of Jesus is always *more* than human (never *other* than human, but always *more*...). Perhaps better to opt for the translation 'it is accomplished' -

All that Jesus had set out to do; all the ministry; all the living; all the healing; all the confronting the powers of darkness; all the raising of the dead dreams and hopeless hopes of the woman at the well, Nicodemus, the man with a withered hand, the fisherfolk of Galilee, Marth and Mary and Lazarus;

All the opening of eyes and hearts, all the pointing to the heavenly realm; all the goading of the Pharisees; all the turning of the things of earth into the things of heaven; all the beautiful, misunderstood, words; all the promises and portents of God's ways with the world - God's plan indeed...*It is accomplished*....

But this is really all about what John shows us as being the very last thing Jesus did, just before..you might say, the 'penultimate thing'

Actually that's been a really important idea in the contemporary Christian world, ever since Dietrich Bonhoeffer expounded the idea of 'penultimate ethics' - in the real, existing world, true Christian faith isn't about living some kind of abstract, ethically pure existence.

It's about living in the midst of the world as it is, in all its messiness, compromise and confusion - we could say, in all its brutality, betrayal and brokenness -

And doing the 'penultimate thing' - 'the next but last thing' - in the really existing world of Nazi Germany an abstract Christian ideal life was not possible; the next best thing, however much it might seem to go against traditional Christian morality, was to oppose Nazism, up to and including joining the plot to assassinate Hitler.

The penultimate thing; maybe that's what we need to think of doing in the present coronavirus crisis; it's a mess without question - the world for the next period is going to be marked by compromise, confusion - and maybe brutality, betrayal and brokenness

We are called to live by faith as Christian people *through* it. And what's the next but last thing? Jesus, knowing the end was very near; knowing everything he'd set out to do was about to be accomplished; believing in God's plan...

Said, 'Son, your Mother, Mother, your Son' - and from then on...

The penultimate thing - the next-but-last thing, this Mother's Day - was to give each to each other - was to give *us* to each other -

In this coronavirus crisis we who are called to live by faith can, perhaps, take this to heart.

God's plan is accomplished. All God in Christ set out to do - to forgive, save, love us all and the world, has been accomplished, once for all time.

However difficult this is, however much worse it gets, we are not to be afraid - we don't have to worry about what God is or appears *not* to be doing - it has all *been* done; in Christ.

All we have to do, the next but last thing we have to do, before Christ returns and his glorious Kingdom is established for ever,

Is care for each other and the world, in Christ's name - on Mother's Day and on every day - from then on...

### **Prayers**

At the outset of this challenging and unnerving time, we pray carefully, maybe even a little tentatively, but still trustingly, knowing there is nothing else to do..

For many bereaved and grieving mothers and fathers, daughters and sons all around the world, whose loved ones have been suddenly struck down and taken – without warning, in great distress, with hardly any comfort. May they be held by the Lord of life.

Lord

### **Hear our prayer**

For many who live in fear of symptoms they have, who suffer from illness and have not yet recovered; who are being very careful for themselves and for those they love – near and far. May they be kept by the Spirit of peace

Lord

### **Hear our prayer**

For many who face each day with anxiety because of lost income, failing business, or scarce resources. May they be sustained by the Maker of All

Lord

### **Hear our prayer**

For many who are tasked to care for others, to plan and organise, manufacture and supply, to speak and lead, to encourage and provide, for the sake of us all. May they be strengthened by Lord of Creation

Lord

### **Hear our prayer**

For folk in churches round here and further afield who seek to live by faith while playing a full part in the frail and fractured life of the world. May they be encouraged by the Christ of God.

Lord

**Hear our prayer**

For the people of Tyndale, who seek to care for one another; for its leaders who work to make the right decisions; for those who have travelled far and want only to return; for others who have their own health concerns; for some who doubt and struggle with the Christian faith; for others who worry about loved ones elsewhere – for us all, in these difficult days

Lord

**Hear our prayer**

For this and each day, for our lives and the life of the world, for ourselves and each other, for suffering and healing, for now and for the future, we stand once more in the promises of God in Christ

Lord

**Hear our prayer**

**'Don't be afraid'**

**Blessing**

The blessing of God almighty, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, be with us all, now and always,  
amen.