

Welcome to the service of Tyndale Baptist Church on this Palm Sunday; as we continue to cope with the daily challenges of this difficult time in world history – and our own lives – we are aware that the life of faith must always make its way through the challenges that we see all around us while holding on to a perspective born of a different world. The people of God have always had that perspective formed and shaped by the stories of Scripture and the experiences of those who lived by the same faith in former ages. So we begin with the words of the prophet Isaiah, from long, long ago.

Isaiah 50.4-9a

So we place our faith in God once more as we listen in to the first song..

‘Today I awake’

Call to worship

The song reminds us of the rhythms of the world and the rhythms of grace – the God of yesterday, today and forever, the God whose power makes us and all things, whose Holy Spirit inspires us and leads through all change, whose Son lives with us and beckons us to new life – and in his name, we worship..

and sing along with

BPW216 All glory, praise and honour

Opening prayer

This is a day of struggle and hope, of looking for victory and rejoicing in the victory of Christ; this is a day for moving on, for turning away from what *is* and turning towards what yet, in Christ, *will be*. This is a day for crying out like the very stones and nothing can stop us; this is a day for praising God like never before. Yes, Lord, the world is shaken, but you are our foundation; yes, Lord, our lives are in turmoil, but your Spirit makes for peace. Yes, Lord, our loved ones and friends are anxious and we are separated, but in Christ all things are reconciled – this we believe, in this we hope, for this we live, this day and each day.

Lord we confess we are ill-prepared for such times as these; we have not cared enough for ourselves, each other and the world. But we turn to you once more; to follow where you lead and to put our hope in Christ once more, who leads the way. Yes, it is a hard way; yes, it goes by a cross, but it does not end there; it leaps and bounds into light and life again, and we would follow the way, come what may – for we would see Jesus – and in the name of He-who-is-our-Lord, the very Lord of life, we worship you

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

Reading

Palm Sunday (Matthew 21.1-11/Luke 19:28-40 Godly Play) – Rachel Haig

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.

We listen to the famous protest song, sung by Joan Baez

'We shall overcome'

Sermon

Today we join the rebellion – not Star Wars, or Lord of the Rings, or some such – not a rebellion against a recalcitrant government or an oppressive dictator, but against something we can't see – just as our rebellion can't be seen – it's the rebellion of faith.

Many have been rebels, these last years: 'We shall overcome' is an anthem that has inspired many, in the Civil Rights movement in the US; against the Vietnam war, during the Velvet Revolution in Prague in 1989; it's been translated into many languages and sung defiantly during trouble, poignantly after terror, emotionally through suffering.

We shall overcome – it echoes in the sentiments of today's leaders as they struggle to do the best thing for whole countries – the whole world – during this pandemic – and as they try to give hope – 'we shall overcome'

I wonder if it would have been sung - if it had been written! - by those who marched alongside Jesus into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday. Some suggest that behind the story in the gospels, Jesus, rather than being at the centre of a procession that he had started, joined in with a procession that was already going into Jerusalem – as always, at Passover. That he was the centre of attention for his followers, but not necessarily at the head of a large crowd.

Imagine this, then: Jerusalem, under the control of Rome, seething with rumour of rebellion ; Roman soldiers looking down from the ramparts for the first sign of trouble, and a *religious* procession coming up into the city – those pesky Jews were always doing something religious – let them carry on, keeps the population quiet if we let them enjoy their festivals – and in the middle of it, hardly noticed by the guards, Jesus and his followers; Jesus at the head of a raggle-taggle motley crew; Jesus leading a rebellion.

But hold on a minute. I said a 'religious procession' – see, the Romans left it alone – let them get on with what these pesky Jews were always getting on with – religion; services at the Temple; hand-washing rituals; processions and festivals. Religion is useful in the world, isn't it? Keeps the population quiet, compliant, while the movers and shakers get on with making the world the way they want it to be – Karl Marx called it 'religion is the opium of the people'.

They let state-sanctioned show religion carry on behind the Iron Curtain; they let churches function in China as long as they don't upset the authorities; Hitler got most of the Christian church on his side by getting its leaders to swear loyalty to him – religion is useful.

It's useful to religious leaders, too – those pastors who refuse to close their meetings in US states during this crisis– who petition state legislatures to let them keep meeting despite the health risks – we want to be left do to our thing; we'll leave you rulers to do your thing.

But in the middle of it all, Jesus, the Rebel King – well, that's a bit strong, I know; as we've always said he refused to be called a king; he rode on a donkey; he was arrested and tried and put to death – not a very successful rebellion, was it?

Unless, it was a different kind of rebellion – a hidden affair, using that showy religion as a kind of smoke-screen behind which he carried on his rebellion of love.

And all that religion – the procession, the festival, later the temple, the Chief Priests and Scribes and so on – all its words and ideas – the ‘holy of holies’; ‘the kingdom of God’; ‘blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord’. The Romans looked on and smiled, indulgently. The leaders of Israel massaged their egos in the warm sentiments and words –

And all the time Jesus was subverting it; using the same hollowed-out words and ideas and filling them with new meaning – the temple was his body; my kingdom is not of this world – you have heard it said but *I* say to you –

A true rebellion – a rebellion of the heart; away from its old, divided loyalties, to a new commitment to God’s eternal, peaceful, kingdom – not *of* this world, but *in* this world – a kingdom of justice and peace and healing and love...

Who knows what will happen in the coming days and weeks; certainly great suffering will continue all around the world; certainly all that can be seen will be turmoil, hardship, sacrifice, the sense of an ending –

And who knows what will emerge? We can’t yet see but until then, Bonhoeffer’s words, the Christian cause will be a silent and hidden affair, but there will be those who pray and do right and wait for God’s own time.

But they’ll rejoice, too - even in the midst of all this destruction; they’ll rejoice. The procession of misery is marching into the cities of pain and great uncertainty and sometimes, often, the procession is garlanded with the trappings of religion – and sometimes, often, the world will cast about for answers amongst the things it already knows.

But in the middle of the procession, hardly noticed by the world, are those who have seen Christ and put their faith in his eternal Kingdom – who will live, silently, hidden, by faith in the One who reconciles all things – they are rebels who have joined the rebellion of faith against all the suffering of the world - and they’ll rejoice – and if ever they should stop rejoicing, even the stones will cry out.

Communion

Invitation

The table of the Lord is spread, it is for those who will come and see in broken bread and poured out wine – not mere symbols, but the very substance of his life shed for us on the Cross and raised again the third day. The risen Christ is present among his people and it is here that we meet him. The invitation is for all who are seeking him and who are weary of their sin and doubt to come and share the feast.

Prayer of Confession

Lord our God, we humbly make confession. Lord, we are like scared children frightened of the dark – the silence scares us, and we run from it, pouring out words that obscure truth, hoping the sound of them will quell the silence – we find it hard to trust, we cast about for reassurances, we cannot rest in faith, we crave certainty, and sight.

Father forgive us and help us once again to hear the Word of Life; to brood and agonise and wrestle within ourselves, with each other, in our communities and our world, to hold the silence... and to rejoice at the coming of the Word and in the light of Christ...(pause in quiet)

Lord, you have spoken. Thanks be to God Amen

Institution

For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you; the Lord Jesus on the night he was betrayed took bread, and when he had given thanks he broke it and said, take, eat, this is my body which is for you, do this in remembrance of me. IN the same way after supper he took the cup saying this cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this whenever you drink it in memory of me – for whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

Thanksgiving

Lord, we thank you for your eternal goodness; your love for us, your life in us, your Son with us, your peace before us.

Lord, we thank you for life itself, and every good thing – out of which goodness we offer ourselves, and this bread and wine, and in thankfulness we take them to ourselves, to feed on Christ; we thank you, most of all, and always, for your most precious gift of He who is our life.

God our Father, pour out the Holy Spirit on all your people, that we may have faith, and upon these gifts of bread and wine and this eating and drinking, that here we may enter into the mysteries of the body and blood of our risen and ascended Lord – so that we may receive Christ to ourselves once again, for the strengthening of our faith, the assuring of our hope, and the deepening of our love.

Responses

We are the people of God,
We are the body of Christ.

We are scattered, and the body of Christ is broken,
But as we gather in spirit, the body of Christ is re-membered.

So we gather in obedience to Jesus' command,
To remember, and to share together in breaking bread and drinking wine,
Remembering the death of Christ.

Each piece of bread that we eat was once scattered across the fields,

And the grain that God gave to grow has become for us the bread of life.

Each sip of wine that we drink was once many vines,
And the grapes that God gave to grow have become for us the new wine of God's kingdom.

In our communion with one another,
We are fed with the bread of heaven that sustains us,
And we drink the wine of gladness that brings us joy.

Bread & Wine

Prayer after communion

Strengthen for service, Lord, the hands that have touched holy things:

May ears that have heard your word be deaf to clamour and dispute, and ready to listen for every whisper of peace and reconciliation in the world

May tongues that have sung your praise be free from deceit, and ready to speak only the truth in love

May eyes that have witnessed the drama of salvation in broken bread and poured out wine shine with the light of hope and look for signs of your Kingdom

Finally may bodies that have been fed with your body be refreshed by your Spirit's work

So may the whole of our lives reflect the wholeness of your Kingdom, and glory be to you for ever,

And though we are separated, we have attempted to gather; so we pray for each other and all those connected with Tyndale who were unable to join in with this service. They, along with many others, will have to face their own anxieties today. They along with us and many others will hear of suffering and destruction today. They, along with us all need, today, to be assured once again of the promise of an eternal, unending, unshakeable Kingdom

Thanks be for your promises in Christ, amen.

We sing along with the final song

'Make way, make way'

Blessing

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