

Welcome

Welcome to the worship of Tyndale Baptist Church – another week in this 'limbo' period between the depths of the 'lockdown' and the 'opening up' that's been happening gradually and which, hopefully will continue on into the autumn, when, it is hoped, Tyndale, along with many other churches, will resume its regular weekly worship in the building.

Of course the summer makes everything seem a little more relaxed, though there's lots of work going behind the scenes. We hope that the letter that was sent out last week makes the new arrangements as clear as possible, and that it will help as each one of us makes a decision about returning to church.

Or, indeed, coming along maybe for the first time. One of the unexpected joys of 'on-line' weekly worship is that, by all accounts, many more people encounter Christian worship than would previously have been seen in church; you can be assured of a warm welcome as well.

This limbo period is a good time to explore some of the fundamentals of Christian faith. Today is the second in a series reflecting on the mysterious nature of the Christian community 'in Christ'

Our first song, by a virtual singing group from Tyndale, is called

CG 99 'One is the body'

A Tyndale virtual singing group

Call to Worship

Called together (though apart) as one under the Head who is Christ – this is the great mystery at the heart of worship. We are not here only by choice; we are not here only as individuals – we are called by God and *united in Christ* – to serve and to worship..

BPW 253 ['Jesus lives! Your terrors now'](#)

the choir of Trinity College, Cambridge

Opening Prayer

The terrors and pains and joys of life on earth continue and, Lord, we worship you; in Beirut they reel in agony – and we worship you; all around the world we grieve coronavirus losses – and we worship you; each day dawns rich with good things for many - and we worship you. For, we believe, in Christ you are in the midst, alongside; you feel what we feel, know what we know, you have been where we must go – and we worship you –

Never to leave us where we are; never to abandon us to our fate; never to forsake us in our need; always to love, always to save, always to bring us new hope, new life; we worship you

That such endless love might be proclaimed; that such faithfulness might be sounded abroad; that such grace might be known by more and more – we worship you – far above, far beneath, far beyond, yet ever near, ever real, ever close – and lifting, holding, changing, enlivening, renewing – this is our hope in Christ; this is the promise of God in Christ; this is the mystery of Christ who lived, died and rose again – this, Lord, is our faith – forgive us when we have failed to believe and live out this truth – we worship you in Christ's name.

['Spirit of heaven' \(Christ in me\)](#)

Stuart Townend

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

Readings

The readings of Scripture this week are by Dorette Morgan and Julian West.

[Romans 8:1-11](#)

[Ezekiel 36:22-28 & 32](#)

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.

Address

Lord we give you this time; may what is spoken ring with truth, may what is heard and understood be touched by your Spirit, and may what is decided lead us on toward your Kingdom. Amen.

We've all seen the pictures by now of that huge explosion in Beirut – ammonia nitrate, badly stored. Whatever of neglect, corruption, fault, the result was nothing less than catastrophic.

Explosions, are like that, wherever and whenever they occur – barrel bombs dropped from a Syrian army helicopter onto a civilian street; IRA bombs in the 1970s – I passed the site of the Birmingham pub bombing on a bus the next morning. The destruction was immense. Firebombs raining down on Dresden in World War II causing firestorms that literally sucked the life out of thousands of people.

Atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945 (the commemoration of 75 years was this week) Never mind the why's and wherefores, the who's and how's, the policies and politics – the explosions. Pulverising solid buildings into powder, shockwaves breaking glass miles away; metal melting into liquid; cars hurled onto their rooftops – and flesh..

The eyewitness account by six survivors of Hiroshima by John Hershey is full of lurid accounts of the damage done to flesh by an explosion – never mind the atomic aspects, just the blast wounds are bad enough – deep cuts; fractures, superating sores, gaping gashes – there'll be plenty of that kind of thing and more in Beirut as we speak – hospitals overwhelmed, doctors having to make instant decisions who to help and who is,,beyond help.

Human flesh can't withstand such force of course; anymore than it can withstand the forces unleashed in a car accident, or a bad fall – then there are all the frailties that affect us, the aches and pains and illnesses that generations of medical expertise have fought against – and now, coronavirus, exposing human frailties once more..

'But you are not in the flesh; you are in the Spirit' – Paul writes in Romans. It's the great human dream, of course, no longer to be bound by the weakness and frailties of human bodily life – the flesh. Religions in Pauls' day touted the idea that fleshly-life is not just frail but in-and-of-itself evil – that the realm of God was a spiritual realm, that the aim of religion was to move folk from out of the flesh into the spirit altogether – by any means – sexual, psychedelic, transcendental –

In fact, religion is still engaged in release from the trials and frailties of human bodily life – Buddhism offering enlightenment, an end to suffering; Hinduism offering freedom from the endless cycle of birth and death.

Not just the classical religions – Scientology, beloved of lots of today's Hollywood stars, proposing that human beings are spirits inhabiting human bodies –

Not just religion – what else is drug use, but an activity aimed at getting out of bodily life as much as possible? In fact you could say that any number of escapist activities are attempts to take us out of the flesh into the spirit.

But the fact is, we're trapped – made of flesh and destined to live in human bodily life.

The genius of Christianity is to locate salvation right in the middle of that human bodily life – Jesus Christ the human being lived and died – as we must live and die – he was human through and through and when he was encountered after the empty tomb people encountered a real human being once more –

Christian words are words such as 'healing' 'reconciling' 'saving' 'giving', 'forgiving' – earthly, bodily words. Christian signs are earthly signs – bread and wine- earthly, bodily elements.

The central Christian symbol is a cross – symbol of a cruel death where human bodily life is at its most vulnerable, weak, damaged and mortal.

Whatever else Paul means when he says 'you are not in the flesh; you are in the Spirit' – he does not mean that we are no longer bodily people – we are human, we can be none other .

But if that is what he does *not* mean, what *does* he mean? He means, I think, that we are 'in Christ' – that some mysterious how the eternal, spiritual reality of the Christ Paul knew as risen Lord is ours.

Complicated, this. Mysterious, this. Beyond logic, this. It's not the religious fantasising of the US pastor who told his congregation to return to church because it was Holy Ground so they would be protected from coronavirus,

But it is, perhaps, something to do with *choices*...with *how we choose to live*.. if you live according to the flesh, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live'. Paul says..

In the end, it all comes down to this, always has, always will – choosing not to live according to the flesh, but choosing to live according to the spirit..

Choosing to live 'in Christ'. Oh, there's a not-very-edifying history of Christians abstaining from all kinds of pleasures and a mind-boggling history of Christians trying to mortify the flesh in an attempt to control it's desires.

And at every example the world – many of us – have looked on and thought 'surely it can't mean *this?*'_Surely it can't mean that we can't have a glass of wine; Surely it can't mean that we must wear a hair shirt; surely it can't mean that we must eschew all earthly pleasures?

God forgive the Church if it has ever traded Paul's soaring vision of life 'in Christ' for a mess of restrictions and religiosity that have sometimes turned Christianity into just one more religion-in-the-world.

For the vision is of a new, transcendent kind of human living – not world-and-flesh denying so much as world-and-flesh enhancing; living through the pains and tragedies and frailties of human bodily life with eyes lifted and fixed on the peace and glory and majesty of God's kingdom

Where human beings will be free; where there will be no more mourning and crying and pain; where there will be welcome and rejoicing and love for ever more

And yes, it's our choice, but it's *possible* to choose because all this is of God; it is God who has set us free; who has transferred us from the kingdom of death into the kingdom of his dear Son; who has raised Christ^[1] from the dead and will give life to our mortal bodies also through^[k] his Spirit that dwells in us.

An image from Hiroshima comes to mind. Somewhere near the epicentre of the explosion, after, was found on a wall the outline – shadow, really – of a human being. Someone who had been vaporised in an instant – the flash so powerful that as their body had disintegrated the outline, like a photograph, had been burned into a wall – far enough away, presumably, that the wall had survived – but not the flesh.

Flesh-life is frail, weak, transient – 'all flesh is like grass' as the Psalmist says. I wonder if something similar might not be discovered in time in Beirut, though, probably, it was because the Hiroshima explosion was nuclear. Still, the instantaneous, widespread destruction is another reminder, as if in this coronavirus world we needed reminding, of how frail life is.

But not God's life –and, as the risen Jesus shows, God transforms the life of the flesh into the life of the Spirit *in Christ*, that lasts for ever

And we are in Christ...thanks be to God.

'King of Kings'

Jarrold Cooper recorded at the NBA Big Sing, Middlesborough Baptist Church 2011

Prayers

We pray for the people of Lebanon and Beirut – those who are grieving the sudden loss of loved ones; those who are suffering the shock and pain of injury and loss; those who bear responsibility for corruption and neglect; those who are wearing themselves out caring, rescuing, mending broken bodies; providing desperately needed food; those who are hoping that something hopeful might emerge from the devastation. We pause in quiet...

Lord, in your mercy

Hear our prayer

We pray for people affected by coronavirus all around the world – those who are grieving the loss of loved ones; those who are suffering from the disease; those who are exhaustedly providing medical help; those whose treatment for other conditions is delayed; those who are researching treatments and vaccines; those who are trying to make difficult decisions for their communities; those who are suffering the effects of isolation. We pause in quiet

Lord, in your mercy

Hear our prayer

We pray for our loved ones and friends; close by or far away, feeling the pain of enforced separation; facing the threat or reality of redundancy; suffering unresolved health conditions; longing for something approaching normality. We pause in quiet

Lord, in your mercy

Hear our prayer

We pray for ourselves; finding the way of faith less clear with every passing week; full of faith and trust in God; longing to meet up again with loved ones; worried for our own health and well-being; glad for all we have received; optimistic about the future; craving the wisdom to make decisions. We pause in quiet

Lord, in your mercy

Hear our prayer

Offering

As the economic world around continues to unravel, we give out of a sense of trust in all God has made, is making, and will make, possible

Lord, we give you of ourselves in these and all our gifts – and in the giving and the continuing to serve we look once more to see the life of the Spirit in the world

BPW 328 'And can it be'

'Altar of Praise Chorale'

Blessing

Now may the blessing of God almighty, Father Son and Holy Spirit, be with us and remain with us always, amen.

Thank you for being a part of this service; thanks to Ians Holyer & Waddington, Rachel Molyneux, a virtual singing group from Tyndale (including Sarah Dodds) and Julian West and Dorette Morgan

I wish you well for the coming week and express the hope that these weeks of summer will bring a measure of relaxation to your life. I encourage you once more to continue to support one another and ask you to continue to think of and pray for all who are working to make a return to Tyndale possible in the coming weeks.

A 'together though apart' time follows at 11.30 am