

Welcome

Welcome to the worship of Tyndale Baptist Church, on another Sunday in this warm, long – and very strange – summer; another on-line service, which is fully a part of the worship-life of Tyndale.

Rachel Haig will be leading the next two Sunday services, so the next time I do so we'll be 'back in Tyndale' – but there's little sense of going back; rather, we're going forward into a changed, different world. There'll be all manner of practical Covid 19 related arrangements (outlined in the recent letter and due to be reinforced in another one just before the opening Sunday) and the service will be 'live streamed'; that is, it will be filmed as it happens and at the same time recorded, so that it can be accessed 'on-line'. We recognise that not everyone will feel comfortable about coming to church at all; it may be that quite a few folk will prefer to take part in the worship at home.

And, likely, there won't be many people in church on the first Sunday in September – and there won't be any singing, and there won't be a communion, and there won't be a collection in the service; but there will be prayers, Scripture, music, a sermon – there will be worship. Folk who've already been to churches that have held similar services over the last few weeks report that, although it's different, it's felt very meaningful and, in its way, 'special'. We hope Tyndale's will feel that way, too. And we hope that you, whoever you are – then, or in the weeks to come, will feel drawn in to Christian worship.

Today is the last in a series reflecting on the nature of the Christian Community 'in Christ'. It begins with the Taize song, which encourages *everyone* to praise the Lord..

'Laudate Dominum' (O praise the Lord our God) Taize - virtual choir and musicians from France

Call to Worship

Praise the Lord; everyone who 'gathers' – even though we're scattered – does so in the light of the intention – and indeed the call – to 'Praise the Lord' – not just because of what, we believe, God has done for us, but because of who God is; but of course he has done much – *everything* – for us 'in Christ'; we praise, we worship in His name.

BPW383 'Immortal, invisible, God only wise'

To a new tune by Sarah Dodds, played by her & sung by a virtual singing group from Tyndale

Opening Prayer

Immortal, invisible – the great words of the well-known hymn take us straight to the heart of the matter – the God we worship is the God of all things; the God who was, is and is to come, the God who, though beyond our sight, is in and through and with – the God of everything – Lord, praise you, God, we worship you; justice, goodness, love, life itself – all things come from you – Lord, praise you, God, we worship you; you are first in our hearts and minds and spirits as we gather; you made us, you breathe life in us every day, you hold us and keep us and call us and save us in Christ; Lord, praise you, God, we worship you;

You are the God of all things; and you are the God of small things – our lives, our hopes and dreams; failures, successes, worries, passions; our pain-wracked world; it's injustices, greeds, enterprises; our glorious world; it's discoveries, advances; creativity – great things from our perspective, but, given the size of the universe and our belief in your immensity – small things, indeed – yet you are God of them all – Lord, praise you, God, we worship you –

For we believe in Christ, in whom our lives and our world are changed for ever by a story of love and service and sacrifice — praise you, Lord, God we worship you

We ask you to forgive us when we have allowed the small things to overwhelm our faith in a God who holds everything – and to restore us once more and to help us believe, once again, that in Christ all things shall be reconciled to God – we praise and worship you in Christ's name.

'The streets of the city'

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

[Psalm 110](#)

[Colossians 3:1-11](#)

BPW 595 'I lift my eyes to the quiet hills'.

Sung by Mike Gamier

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.

In a few day's time I shall be sixty five. Before you rush to rejoice, or to reel at the prospect, I have to say that retirement is no longer shackled to a particular age as once it was..

Still, it feels like a significant milestone, and it can't help but lead me to reflect, somewhat, on aspects of my ministry thus far as we come to the final part in the series of reflections on the Christian community 'in Christ'. My ministry in part of that community has coincided with a period of quite profound change. When I began my first pastorate the so-called 'charismatic movement' was burgeoning and the fledgling 'Churches Together' movement was starting to redefine relationships between the major denominations.

I pastored a small Baptist church that had long kept a foot in both camps – active in the local ecumenical group *and* in the local 'Evangelical Alliance' – churches which held to a high view of Scripture. I attended an EA meeting that was discussing whether to join the new Churches Together group (it had previously remained *outside* the Council of Churches, which was, in its eyes, a bit dodgy. Now the Council of Churches was reforming itself around a Trinitarian statement, which was more amenable to Evangelicals). Some members still weren't happy. One minister illustrated the dilemma by pointing at someone & saying 'it's like this; I'm friends with you, but I'm a bit worried about who you're friends with..'

In the end the EA agreed to join – until a few weeks later, the Metropolitan Community Church applied to join and was accepted. The MC Church is a church (more properly a network of churches) that welcomes and affirms gays and lesbians. But it is also 'sound' in EA terms – worshipping God the Trinity, particularly. On the news of its welcome into Churches Together in Southampton, the EA hastily reversed its decision...' I'm friends with you, but I'm a bit worried about who you're friends with..'

I suppose that's been a fairly constant 'background hum' throughout my ministry – what might be called the 'ins and outs' of the Christian community. In Leicester it focussed on relationships between churches that wanted to explore closer working but that felt the pull of their respective, strong, independent traditions.

It was also a feature of life in a university chaplaincy where a group of traditional denominational ministers of many different churches tried to be open to trends in university life without compromising their beliefs on the one hand, or descending into awkward trendiness on the other. One time, the group was discussing if it should take part in a new student welfare exhibition. We wanted to do so, but there were going to be stalls from various student sexual identity societies and, so we had been told, the welcome pack would include free condoms. One chaplain, a RC, summed up what we would like to communicate 'Sex is good, we just think you shouldn't be having quite so much!!

In Bristol we have as a church been frequently involved in the challenge of relating to folk of different sexualities and often found ourselves at odds with the local Association's stance. The Community Ministry has challenged us to relate to the local life of the street, joyfully but not always easily.

The 'ins and outs' of the Christian community – for me it's the challenge posed by the principle outlined in an almost throw-away verse in the letter to the Colossians

there is no longer Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and free; but Christ is all and in all!

The verse comes in the middle of a typical 'do's and don't's' kind of passage, in which Christians are urged to 'put to death'; 'get rid of' 'do not'...and 'clothe yourselves'; 'forgive'; 'be thankful' etc etc – behaviour; fertile ground of judgement and discrimination and all manner of moralising, the staple of church life and preaching for centuries.

Perhaps moralising most of all; I think that's one of the problems with the way the Church is often viewed – moralising. Lots of folk have been turned off the Church once and for all by it. I was at University while the moral panic in the light of the AIDS epidemic was in full swing. One of my lecturers, a Roman Catholic, said one time (tongue-in-cheek, I'm sure) that he thought it'd be better to return to the approach of the Spanish inquisition- persecuting people for errant belief - instead of now, when the Church often persecuted people for what, in its eyes, was 'errant behaviour'

But in the middle of it all, the principle 'there is no longer Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and free; but Christ is all and in all!'

Quite a vision of acceptance and welcome of everyone. I've long read about and talked about Greeks and Jews and circumcision and uncircumcision and slave and free and thought mostly of the principle as applying to relationships within the church.

but if I'm honest I've glossed over the inclusion of barbarian and Scythian.

Who were they? They were the non-Greek speaking, unsophisticated roughians of the day. I can't imagine many of them ever came into close contact with the Christian communities though there's some suggestion that some of the slaves of the day might have been Scythians, but the suspicion of and prejudice toward, barbarians and Scythians (a war-like nomadic race that roamed over a vast territory that was part of what is now Ukraine, Kazakhstan and Romania) was widespread. Barbarian has become a widely used term for unsophisticated, even primitive, people, ever since.

I suppose you could say they were the outsiders, the not-welcome-round-here types, rough-of-speech, badly behaved, beyond-the-pale. There are plenty of groups around like that today, who, sadly, have little contact with the Christian church.

I wonder if Paul included them for that reason. A challenge to the church to recognise that no one *but no one* was outside the scope of God's love in Christ – 'Christ is all and in all', indeed..

That's the first and last point about being 'in Christ' – as I said at the outset, if we identify with the Christian faith; if we follow the teachings of Jesus; if we wrestle with faith and doubt and offer our lives in service, great or small; if we try, however haltingly, to worship; if we know something of what it means to confess our sins and to taste forgiveness; Whoever we are – God knows who we are - we are *in Christ*..

But more than that, I think. It's a challenge to think of *everyone* – even the most unlikely, who probably won't ever cross the doors of the church, as being 'in Christ' – the challenge that has driven the church in missionary and ministry enterprise down all the years.

It might all be about behaviour for some in the Christian church, but we can be sure it doesn't feel as if it's about behaviour for many 'outside' – it feels as if the Church is *excluding, not welcoming*...*not* holding out the principle that is, surely, a consequence of the good news of Jesus Christ, who spent time with tax collectors, prostitutes and lepers, who died the death of a slave..

The rejected stone that has become the cornerstone - Christ is all and in all!

As I say, it's been a background hum for all my ministry. I think it will always be there, in every generation, in every tradition of the Christian church.

Whoever we are – God knows who we are - we are *in Christ*.

Or, 'Open to God, Open for all'.

Or, As Tyndale prepares to reopen in the coming weeks, with all the challenges that will come in its wake, 'All are welcome in this place..'

Prayers

The principle of welcome and acceptance is one that needs holding up increasingly in the present age

We pray for those seeking asylum who are undertaking risky, dangerous journeys towards the United Kingdom across the channel. That there might grow amongst us a new spirit of welcome. We pause in quiet..

Lord in your mercy **Hear our prayer**

We pray for those beginning to settle back into life on the streets of British cities
That they might find their way to practical help & solutions. We pause in quiet..

Lord in your mercy **Hear our prayer**

We pray for any who feel rejected by the Church because of their looks, lifestyle or behaviour
That the love of Christ might meet them where, and how, they are. We pause in quiet..

Lord in your mercy **Hear our prayer**

We pray for our loved ones and friends
That they might have their hope renewed. We pause in quiet..

Lord in your mercy **Hear our prayer**

We pray for ourselves
That we might remain true to what we believe. We pause in quiet..

Lord in your mercy **Hear our prayer**

Offering

We give in a spirit of generosity and welcome

'We give of ourselves in these and all our gifts and look, in the giving and the serving, towards God's
peaceable Kingdom'

Blessing

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 Dave Bell

I hope you continue to enjoy the summer and that your faith will enable you to live through the continuing challenges of this time in a spirit of resilience and thankfulness – and that we can all look forward to meeting again in the not-too-distant future.

A 'together though apart' time follows at 11.30 am