

Welcome

Once again, welcome to worship – in the church or online. Whether you're wearing a mask or sitting in front of a screen it's bound to feel different to how it used to be – but such things are but signs of the restrictions on freedom that we are all experiencing. But freedom is of the very essence of the Christian gospel and we are glad that, despite such restriction, we are free to gather, free to participate, and free to worship – we spare thought and prayer for all those round the world for whom the freedoms we enjoy are beyond comprehension.

Again, no formal notices in the service, just a reminder that there's to be no standing and no singing – apart from what you are able to utter under your breath, through your masks. Great technical progress has been made and Ian and Bruce can be well pleased with what has been achieved so far, but I'm sure they would want me to reiterate their hope that you will be patient should there be any delays – or mistakes - there was one last week, by me as it happens, but only they noticed!

Gatherings for worship are on the exclusion list that accompanies the government's new rules (so long as we don't huddle together in groups of more than six – I'm not sure we ever did!), so we anticipate that Sunday services will continue to happen in this form for the next few weeks at least. But clearly Covid 19 is still going to disrupt 'normal life' for the foreseeable future. Unique as this pandemic experience is, still it is part of the 'groaning and travailing' of creation that's part of our theme this morning - which is hope – Christian hope – the hope of being set free..

'Holy, holy, holy, God almighty Lord'

Tyndale Virtual Singing Group

Call to worship

Wherever we are, we are united in spirit for, we believe, we are one in Christ. God calls us just as he has made us and acted to save us in Christ. We gather in the midst of a constrained, restricted world, in the light of the promises of God in Christ, to know the truth, to see the light and to be set free – and we gather in Christ's name, to worship

['Great is thy faithfulness'](#)

Opening Prayer

Lord, in the freedom of this time we worship you. The restrictions of the world are all around but we reach out to where you dwell in eternal, marvellous light and praise you for the ways the universe works – the universe and our lives in these moments revel in the glorious freedom of *being* – of life itself – of every heartbeat and thought and emotion and relationship; we worship you for it all.

Yet, Lord, we confess that soon enough our freedoms are constrained by our fear and our existence is limited by the death-dealing, life-denying, spirit-sapping powers that bring us down – the powers that make us weak; the powers that lead us in selfish ways; the powers that undermine and overturn our best thoughts and intentions. Forgive us and restore us, we ask

For we would rise again; we would walk in freedom again; we look to live in a world shot through with the freedom and glory of life; we would see a world in which more and more people rejoice in your presence and revel in your love and enjoy the peace and justice that flows from your heart into every corner of creation and of our lives.

We would see Jesus; in whom your love and glory and freedom are made known to us, in a life of service, in a sacrificial death and in a glorious, mysterious, life-changing resurrection.

For life, for freedom, for glory, for this and every day, we worship you in Jesus' name.

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

['The truth that sets us free'](#)

Readings

[Genesis 3:1-13 & 22-24](#)

[Romans 8:18-39](#)

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.

Sermon

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 towards your Kingdom. Amen.

We know, don't we, about the groaning & travailing of creation? We know - glaciers are melting, forests are burning, wildlife continues to decline –

We know also about the baleful impact of the coronavirus pandemic; more restrictions, less freedom.

Oh, it's not all gloom and doom – some animal populations are exploding and, because of the lockdown – Zoom, music recording, the joy of simple things like country walks.

But we know, don't we? The restrictions, limits to our freedoms? We who, a short time ago could do anything we felt like are discovering limits to our freedom to travel, freedom of association –

Paul writes: *the creation was subjected to futility.. the whole creation has been groaning in labour pains until now; and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption...*

That's how it is, from a Christian view – everything we see & know, – from the farthest star to the smallest plankton & everything in between, and us – groaning and travailing;

Yet it was all so *long ago*. Paul couldn't see anything we see; knew nothing of climate change, species loss, environmental degradation; never alarmed by statistics or flustered by on-line videos or bothered by news reports –

In his world the sun shone out of blue middle eastern skies onto azure Med'n seas while lambs frolicked in the fields of Palestine & birds sang in the cedars of Lebanon

That's how we see the world, don't we? *Long ago* was better than now; less pollution, Eden was perfect, no pesky internal combustion engine fumes; no single-use plastic – !

Yet, long ago, in Paul's world – groaning and travailing...the creation subjected to futility.

Maybe because Paul didn't see it like that at all – saw past the beauty & the pain - in Paul's day disease was rife, life was short, crops regularly failed, tribes *marauded* –

Many folk regarded the world as evil and best escaped from - lots of religions were on hand to help them escape – and, don't forget, Rome wasn't far away with its cruelty....

Maybe because Paul was bound to have known the stories of Genesis – the ancient story of the great sundering of humankind from the perfect garden –

Never mind for now the sexist cruelty of the verses we didn't read - women's pain increasing & husbands ruling over wives – like something written by Tony Abbot..

Just the idea that from way back there was a disconnect between the good creation & the sin-infested, world in which, ever since, HBs have tried to survive.

Never mind what Paul didn't see: he saw well enough a world beautiful but marred, people wonderful but woeful. & if he couldn't see a photo of the galaxies he could look up at the stars & imagine

That all this, *all this – every part*, – the whole creation, including you & me – was groaning and travailing...groaning inwardly...waiting for...*freedom*..

Romans again: *from its bondage to decay; waiting for the freedom of the glory of the children of God; waiting for adoption, the redemption of our bodies.*

My friends the theme of hope continues - the hope of sharing the glory of God & the *hope of being set free*.

That's part of Paul's gospel vision: as he wrestled against his own thorn in the flesh; vied with the other apostles, set out on perilous journeys; endured beatings, shipwrecks, jail & hostility;

as he planted churches & spoke of the hope of the whole creation to be set free.

That's the hope, still, isn't it? That one day we will be set free; no longer to endure aches & pains, fears & frailties; that the world will no longer burn; that our relationships & emotions will no longer be skewed; our failures won't find us out & our suffering will be over and we won't be restricted

& people won't be imprisoned for no reason and the Uighurs won't be persecuted – or the Rohingya – that there won't be militia with guns on US streets and the bombs will no longer fall in Syria and the politicians will no longer dissemble, that viruses will no longer rampage – and we will be set free...

That's got to be the hope, surely. Well here's the thing..here's what the gospel has to say about it – here's how Paul puts it – the creation has been groaning and travailing *until now*. The whole creation has been groaning in labour pain *until now*..

That's the gospel, my friends – *until now*...until Christ.!

Long ago purposed; long ago planned – right from when they were thrown out of the garden all through the Cs of strife & conflict *until now*

It's the glorious, mysterious tension of the gospel, the 'now, not yet' – the 'already, yet to be' – our hope of being set free; the hope of all creation, begins; it's hope *realised*; not just wishful, pie-in-the-sky thinking – it's *now* and *now* and *now*

To be said over and over again, so that the world will discover that its groaning & travailing, its longing to be free – has lasted *until now*

Say it loud and clear to a world that needs to hear it – now is the time...now we are set free; now there is no reason or need to continue in the same old death-dealing ways – now...freedom and life are ours – we are set free.

And even as we say it we have to look around at a world that still groans and travails, still groans inwardly, still waits in hope – & long & yearn again, & turn again, & listen again for any and every whisper of the freedom that is ours and the worlds in Christ.

So that, once again, with rejoicing, we may echo the words of Paul:

Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will hardship, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

BPW 622 ['Freedom is coming'](#)

Intercessions

Today we pray for freedom

For those who are in prison through no fault of their own, but just because of where they happen to live or because of the religion or race to which they belong, or because of political game-playing. We hear of such folk, in China, in Myanmar, in parts of the Middle East. We pray that in their distress they might yet know the undergirding peace of God

Lord in your mercy **Hear our prayer**

For those who are in prison because of their bravery and readiness to stand up for what is right. We know there are such folk in Belarus, Russia, China, elsewhere. We pray that in their resolve they might know the strengthening presence of God

Lord in your mercy **Hear our prayer**

For those who are in prison because of miscarriages of justice or mistaken identity. We expect there are such folk in this and many countries of the world. We pray that in their loneliness they might come to trust in the truth and justice of God

Lord in your mercy **Hear our prayer**

For those who are in prisons of their own making, because of addictions, prisons of the mind because of mental illness, prisons of the body because of great age or disability. We see such folk around us every day. We pray that in their frustration they might know the calming patience of God's Spirit.

Lord in your mercy **Hear our prayer**

For we who are having to come to terms with restrictions and limits to freedom, perhaps for the first time. We pray that we might be ready to trust in the freedom that is ours in Christ.

Lord in your mercy **Hear our prayer**

Finally for all who work for prison reform, who campaign for freedom and justice, who bring relief and who are ready to stand alongside those with no voice. We know that there are such people around the world. We pray that they will be encouraged and discover that they are doing God's work

Lord in your mercy **Hear our prayer**

Offering and Prayer

Lord we are grateful for all we have received and glad to anticipate all that is yet to come from your generous hand. As we give of ourselves in these and all our gifts, we look to the coming of your peaceable Kingdom. amen

BPW 260 ['Thine be the glory'](#)

Blessing

The blessing of God Almighty, Father, Son and Holy Spirit be with us and remain with us always.

Thanks to Ian Holyer and Bruce Lloyd for all the technical arrangements for today, to Rachel Molyneux, Sarah Dodds, and the Tyndale Singers for the recorded music, to Nick and Tina Parsons for getting the service out online and the script in in the post, to Rachel Haig, and to Ian Waddington for his continuing management of the website. Thanks also to today's stewards and 'preparers' – and thanks to you all for taking part this morning. This 'new normal' pattern of worship will continue over the coming weeks.

Please feel free to join in with the 'Zoom' coffee time that continues after the service and can be accessed by anyone returning home – unless you happen to live in Glasgow, in which case you probably won't make it in time...