

Welcome

Welcome back to Tyndale this morning – & to the 'live streamed' service if you're accessing it via the website (or the later recording). Anyway you're very welcome, as we continue to travel through Advent.

We're very glad to be back in the church, after this second lockdown period – even though we're still under tier restrictions and can't be clear, yet, how things will progress. We *are* planning to be open for the next three Sundays, but of course Christmas this year is going to be different – with recorded services playing a major part – watch this space, as they say.

As before there are no formal notices in the service, except for 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; which applies as well, of course, to the responses. We shall be conducting communion this morning, in the way we have been doing, with the sealed cups of wine and wafers that you may have taken as you came in..

Once again thanks to Bruce and Ali for sourcing them, to Ian & Bruce for the technical work involved today; & to the stewarding team. The hope is that we will express those thanks by following the directions

The second Sunday in Advent – traditionally this is the occasion for commemorating the Word – even though Bible Sunday happened a few weeks ago..this Sunday reflects on the ministry of John the Baptist – the messenger – which highlights that the Word *lives* – it is always more than words written on a page; God speaks to create everything; John speaks a word from God to herald the way – the way for the living Word, Jesus Christ, who is coming into the world...'come now, Lord Jesus'

Advent Candle lighting song 'Come now Lord Jesus'

Tyndale Virtual singing group

Call to Worship

This candle we light is a sign of the Word
It will shine in our worship for all of this hour;

**Today we will honour its promise and power;
The Word lasts for ever – haven't you heard?**

The candle we light remains silent, but say,
To sorrow and silence? And no enemy, friend
The candle will shine while the Word is proclaimed;
As we trust in God's Word. Though much is concealed

**Haven't you heard that God's voice brings an end
Will be able to speak when He brings in His Day
We will listen for what will surely be revealed
Christ's love shall be shown, shall be claimed.**

The candle flickers but the Word remains sure. **The light is but small, though God's promise is vast.**
And we – though the world & our lives may not last - **Hear the Word and believe and rejoice as we hear**

BPW 441 ['Let All Mortal Flesh Keep Silence'](#)

Opening Prayer

Lord, we fall silent before you (pause in quiet) and we worship. The ancient mystery gathers around us in the darkness and silence of this time – over long ages it has been proclaimed, and still today we proclaim it, and for time to come – however long - it will be proclaimed – God with us, Christ our Lord, the ancient of Days, through whom all things were made. The music of the spheres, the groaning of creation, the particles of the universe, the distant stars, the life of earth, our longing hearts – *everything* made for worship – and we worship you.

And, Lord, in Advent, we acknowledge, we were born for this, *made* for this – this worship-in-waiting, this praising-in-silence; this serving-the-Word; this heralding, this timeless, endless, mysterious *trusting, believing, seeking, hoping* – this is our calling, our destiny, our joyful purpose – 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



Reading: [Isaiah 40.1-11](#)

CG 97 'O the life of the world'

Tyndale virtual singing group

Reading: [Mark 1.1-8](#)

Sermon

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

I was reading this week about Cosmic Background Radiation; I gather that CBR is a faintly detectable force that's everywhere throughout the universe and that's thought to be left over from the 'Big Bang' – when the universe is thought to have begun in a great explosion.

Apparently a couple of scientists reckoned that if the universe was created by some *one* it's likely that 'he' might have left a message, hidden somewhere, that could, one day, be discovered and read.

They think that if that message was hidden anywhere, it would be in the Cosmic Background Radiation – like some kind of heavenly signature drifting through the vast reaches of space, detectable only by the most sensitive of instruments, that would provide, if it was found, some kind of proof that it all means something.

Anyway, apparently they have discovered something but, when translated into some kind of electronic buzz that only they could read, it's just gobbledygook; a stream of sounds & furious fuzz that signifies nothing..

I could have saved them the trouble – not that they were ever likely to ask the likes of me for any help. They're scientists!

Still, I could have saved them the trouble. I could have pointed them...to Isaiah, perhaps - or to the beginning of Genesis, or to the insights of thousands of years of reflection on these things.

I could have suggested they won't find anything, 'cos all there is, all there ever was, was a voice..in the beginning, *God said*. 'Comfort, O comfort my people, says your God.'

That's the mystery at the heart of all things. Never mind cosmic signatures; never mind background radiation; never mind obelisks – did you hear about that weird standing obelisk they found last week in the Utah desert? It disappeared and another one turned up in Romania, and now there's another in California.

Never mind obelisks, signatures – all there is, all there was, all we'll ever know is – *God said*.

A voice..God spoke creation into existence. God spoke to Adam & Eve, to Abraham and Sarah, to Moses, to Elijah, to Deborah, to Isaiah. A voice says, "Cry out!"

Have you found your voice? Your voice is you, isn't it? It's who you are *put out there*

Oh yes, you do things; you've got physical characteristics and a certain style, but, really, it's your voice by which you are known – pity those who have been muted (all those Zoom moments – can't hear you – you're muted..!)

Pity those who can't speak, 'cos they're locked up in prison, or lost in a group or they're ill – pity those who can't hear; pity those who have to rely on a Stephen Hawking-style computer generated voice –

Aren't those Alexa-type things creepy, that just sit there on your mantel-piece until you ask them a question – then they speak..they're only a computer, *but they speak*

A voice..what could the voice of God possibly sound like? a great Earl Stanley Jones or Brian Blessed-type deep voice, booming out across the solar system,

Or, maybe, a still, small voice, a strong, silent type, whispering though the Milky Way?

None of these, I think..A voice, the voice of God – not so much the *sound*, but the *intention*, the sheer *personality* of a voice, the impermanent nature of speaking – God spoke,

But like when we speak, maybe someone hears, maybe not – maybe the sound just goes out there and fades away...leaves no trace – nothing that can be kept –

I know voices can be recorded; thank God voices can be recorded, or else where would we have been these last few months?..

But no one has ever recorded the voice of God

For essentially...a voice speaks....and trails away...and maybe something happens, maybe not, but there's nothing, after – no record in the CBR, you scientists, however much you look

There's nothing there...except, *everything's* there...*here!* – everything that exists – planets, stars, cosmic gases, oceans, amoebas, fruit bats – you and me...

we live...because God has spoken....because, a voice. Isaiah again: A voice says, 'Cry out!'

That's the point of today in Advent: all who have ears to hear, let them hear - A voice says, 'Cry out!'

Today is for John the Baptist...at heart, never mind all the camel hair and locusts and wild honey and stuff – John hears, as so many before and since have heard..

A voice...the very essence and personality of God speaking deep into the soul, making us leap with joy and tremble with fear and turn from what we want to say, to what God wants said...

That's the thing about John, see – a voice of one crying in the wilderness. That's what we've been wrestling with ever since, down all the Christian centuries;

in the wilderness of the world, barren with injustice, arid with disease, dry from lack of compassion, starved of truth, running with hate -

A voice says 'cry out' – and those who live by faith have always had to struggle amongst themselves to hear what the voice is saying – and sometimes – often – they have thought the voice has been telling them to become powerful or to

be popular or to worship created things; they have manipulated people by claiming that they have heard the voice of God

But really the voice – the authentic voice of God - has always said, to those who have replied ‘ what shall I cry?’ – in any society or situation on earth, and they have always heard, an echo of what Isaiah heard. Isaiah heard - *All people are grass, their constancy is like the flower of the field. The grass withers, the flower fades, when the breath of the LORD blows upon it; surely the people are grass. The grass withers, the flower fades; but the word of our God will stand forever. Get you up to a high mountain, O Zion, herald of good tidings; lift up your voice with strength, O Jerusalem, herald of good tidings, lift it up, do not fear; say to the cities of Judah, “Here is your God!”*

Good news, to the fragile people of Isaiah’s day – good news – ‘here is your God’

And when John the Baptist heard it, he heard an echo of the prophet Isaiah,

“I am sending my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way; the voice of one crying out in the wilderness: ‘Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight,’”

That’s what John heard – he, in his day, said in his heart ‘what shall I cry?’ – what shall I become? How shall I speak? And he heard the voice of God saying ‘Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight,’”

That’s Advent, really. It’s a message filled with hope – it’s good news, glad tidings, but, *more*, it’s a message that must be heard – here is your God!

In Isaiah’s day it was a message to the exiles, in the midst of all the barrenness of Israel’s deserted cities – 150 years or so of barrenness before they heard ‘here is your God!’

In J the B’s day it was a message to the benighted people of Israel under the heel of Rome – 300 years, probably, since anyone had heard from anyone like a prophet – ‘there is your God!’ – Jesus – beginning his ministry in the desert

In our day? Barrenness all around; illness without let; economic hardship, mental distress, isolation – you name it – signs of hope yes, please God 2021 will be filled with good old fashioned hopeful things, like open shops and pubs and such-like..

And not 300 years, not 150 years, not more than a few years, probably, since most people knew where to go to hear the good news – but now – the voice..

See, Advent is for *us*—we have ears to hear – and in our homes and churches and communities and societies, in coronavirus barrenness and economic dryness and spiritual emptiness, we are called to listen for the voice (indicate table) and say, in the speaking and the living and the serving, ‘here is your God’

Offering

We pray: Lord, in the barrenness and emptiness, still in hope and thankfulness we turn to you, and give of ourselves in these and all our gifts and this bread & wine; thankful that the barrenness is ended by the coming of Christ and hopeful that the emptiness will be filled in your peaceable, eternal Kingdom.

Grace

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

[‘Come thou fount’](#) (Above all else)

Chicago church of Christ virtual choir

Communion

The table of the Lord is spread. Here we see in broken bread and poured out wine not merely symbols, but the very substance of the body and blood of Christ, signs of the Kingdom and emblems of salvation. Yet there is no magic here, no instant access to the things of God, but, in Advent, sign, promise, and sacrament – God’s way of salvation, made real for us in the things of earth.

And here is issued a call; it’s not to the worthy, or the saintly, but to the sinful, and the poor-in-spirit, the ones who know themselves to be in need of God’s constant help and forgiveness and grace – all those who, in Advent, are prepared to wait for His Word.- a call to any, who are prepared to hear and respond; come, and eat and drink, and live.

Confession

Lord our God, here at this table we confess our part in a waiting world, a world grown tired of its sufferings and its sins; we share the tiredness, and we wait with longing hearts.

We confess our part in a failing church, a church often preoccupied with its own survival and slow to serve the world for Christ’s sake; we share the failure, and we turn again with repentant hearts.

We confess our responsibility for our own sinfulness – a hasty word, a thoughtless action, a neglect of what’s good and right and true – we groan at our own weaknesses, and we come to you with needy, expectant hearts.

Father forgive us and as we wait in Advent remind us once again of your promises – we wait on your word. Isaiah says, ‘lift up your voice with strength, O Jerusalem, herald of good tidings, lift it up, do not fear; say to the cities of Judah, “Here is your God!”’. 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

Lift up your hearts!

We lift them to the Lord.

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God!

It is right to give him thanks and praise.

It is not only right, it is our duty & our joy at all times & in all places to give you thanks & praise

Holy Father, almighty & eternal God, through Jesus Christ, your only Son, our Lord....

Therefore with angels and archangels and with all the company of heaven we proclaim your great and glorious name, for ever praising you and saying

Holy Holy Holy, God of power & might. Heaven & earth are full of your glory.

Hosanna in the highest. Blessed is he who comes in the name of the lord. Hosanna in the highest!

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 this may be for us the mystery of the body and blood of our risen 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

Here is bread **For us to eat in hope**

Here is wine **For us to drink in faith.**

How shall we eat?

Waiting for the Kingdom: hungry for peace and justice; looking to feed on Christ

How shall we drink?

Waiting for the new wine of the Kingdom; thirsty for love; looking to Christ to refresh our lives.

With all who wait & hunger and thirst for the life of God

We eat and drink in faith

So as we come to break bread and lift the cup we ready ourselves, all who wish to join in, to open the seal containing the wafer and eat, and then to open the second seal, ready to drink together – or, if you are at home, to eat whatever bread and - wine? Juice? – you have prepared..

Bread & Wine

Prayer after communion

Strengthen for service, Lord, the lives that have been offered in the cause of holiness:

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 (*We pray for the people of the world who wait, hoping, while filled with anxiety, pain and uncertainty every day – we pray that your Spirit will make a way through the desert*)

May tongues that have used words be ready to fall silent before your Word. (*We pray for all who seek in the words on the Bible's page for living words that will ring with the life of your Word to us in Jesus Christ*)

May eyes that have witnessed the drama of salvation here shine with the light of hope and look for every sign of your Kingdom (*We pray for help to see our Christian lives at home, at work, at rest and in the world, as a ministry and calling to live the good news..*)

Finally may hands that have held bread and wine be quick to reach out in friendship and willing to work for the healing of all. (*We pray for those who this day will serve others in hospitals, care homes and charities – and though they are unable to touch, we pray that they will know the warm touch of your unending love*)

So may the whole of our lives reflect the wholeness of your Kingdom, as we wait for your coming, Amen

BPW 314 'Lo he comes with clouds descending'

Blessing

Thanks to Rachel, Sarah, to the Tyndale Singers, to Edward and Sue for the readings and to Nick & Tina for getting the script out in the post. Thanks to Ian for producing and recording the service in the church. A 'together though apart' time follows at 11.30 am