

## Welcome

Welcome to the worship of Tyndale Baptist Church – recorded in the building, which is now closed out of solidarity with all who must endure the closure of a business, the loss of income and the rigours of illness and bereavement during this pandemic. It is little more than symbolic, but it is painful nevertheless to have to remove from people who come here the joy of fellowship and worship in this space that has meant and still means so much to so many.

Still, though the building is closed, our hearts are open – to God and to one another – and in that spirit of openness we extend a warm welcome to any and all who may be joining in with this service, which can be accessed as a recording through the church's website.

But actually it doesn't matter how much or how little our hearts are open to God. Christian worship is conducted in the confidence that God comes to us however much we are open to Him, or otherwise – 'when our hearts are wintry, grieving or in pain' – as the hymn puts it – as are many during this terrible time.

The fact is we don't always feel like worshipping, and may not be very sure about what we believe in the first place – this worship is for everyone; faith-filled or 'faith-forlorn'. One of the great reassurances in the words of Jesus, I think, comes as he often addresses people 'you of little faith' – it's not our faith (that is, not the size or strength of our faith), nor our open hearts, that matter, it is God that matters – God has come to us, as we are. The joy and hope is in the expectation that he promises to transform us by His own Holy Spirit-

### ['Come, now is the time to worship'](#)

#### Call to worship

Now we are frail; now we are wounded in the world; now we are more conscious of our need than at any time; now we come together in our hearts; and now, in this time, in this 'together though apart' place, God is to be found; in all his glory and grace and simplicity and peacefulness – in Christ, indeed. In his name, we worship

**BPW 383 'Immortal, Invisible'**

Tyndale virtual singing group

#### Opening Prayer

Beyond any thing that we can see or understand, God dwells 'immortal; invisible' - invisible to the telescopes that search the distant galaxies, invisible to the microscopes that search the tiniest particles; immortal, beyond all dying and living – this is God who we worship, with our tiny thoughts and our puny words – God, we worship you; greater than our greatest imaginings. God we worship you; finer than our finest dreamings; God we worship you..

Yet gracious beyond all telling; as close as our next breath; as real as our next step; as like us as our every human moment - in Jesus, through Jesus, because of Jesus – sign and Son of God, saviour of and sufferer for the world – God in Christ we worship you

We who are suffering worship you; we who are lonely and isolated and whose world is in turmoil worship you; we who are frail and sinful worship you – and as we worship we crave your forgiveness..(pause in quiet)

The words of John are the Word of God to us – 'The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it'. Thanks be to God,

Now, Lord, in your invisible, immortal, all-powerful, all-encompassing love, accept all that we have to offer – as we worship you, Father Son and Holy Spirit, in Jesus' name, Amen.

#### 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*

**CG 51 ['How can I keep from singing'](#)**

**Reading [Genesis 14:17-20](#)**

**['The Lord's my Shepherd'](#)**

Stuart Townend

**Reading [John 2:1-11](#)**

#### 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've been thinking about the bottles containing the vaccines - millions of them – each one with a little plastic cap... Stock footage from the factories shows them making their way along conveyors till they pass under the special machines that fill them and seal them.

The wedding at Cana story revolves around – not little bottles, but big jars, made of stone, containing first water, then, according to the story, wine.

Having spent many years working in factories I tend to latch on to examples of production - the workers on the production lines, all the drivers, pilots, packers, movers, administrators; accountants who've worked out the cost of it all and sent out the invoices; all the scientists who developed; the designers who designed, the makers who made; so many others..

Every time I hear some Government minister saying 'we're on track' I find myself thinking about the bottles. This is not happening in Whitehall's wood panelled, carpeted offices and corridors, this is happening in a Belgium factory, a laboratory in Oxford, on a trading estate outside Liverpool; a dockside in Kent or Rotterdam or in an airport storage facility in Paris or Mumbai. It's happening where men and women in hi-viz jackets guide trucks into place.

It's happening where Mandy clocks off and goes home from her 12 hour shift in a packing warehouse and sighs out her pride at *at last* having made a contribution to the 'world's life' before getting on with the kid's tea I often think about the bottles... Today let's think about the jars, in the Cana story. Big jars, it seems. I imagine they were made in Cana or nearby by some local craftsman – an ancient means of production.

Anyway, at some point, the jar, along with 5 others, was filled with water. In that arid land, in that far-off time, jars full of water would be precious indeed – containing what was vital for life – people can't live without water, can they? Just as now, it's clear, we can't live, not *really* live – without a vaccine – without a little bottle containing something vital for life.

And there's an interesting tension in John's gospel, between water and wine. The 'fruit of the vine' that Jesus promises to those in the Kingdom occurs in Luke's gospel. In John wine only appears in the Cana story and in one other place – where Jesus on the cross says 'I am thirsty' and they give him *sour wine* to drink

Aside from the communion passages, wine gets a mixed press in the NT- just one reference to its health-giving properties in Timothy, then in Revelation it's become a symbol of something not very nice – the 'wine of God's wrath'; 'with the wine of fornication (of the kings of the earth) the inhabitants of the earth have become drunk.'

That'll do on this Sunday after the inauguration in Washington DC. The 'Kings of the earth' – and that disposed 'King' Donald J Trump making his way out of the back door of the White House. Did you see his supporters a couple of weeks ago breaking into the Capitol building? Many of them were *revelling* in it – anger and passion was everywhere – you could say they were almost *drunk with the wine of fornication of the Kings of the earth..*

I don't know exactly where the truth lies in all those accusations made against Trump. The wine of fornication is something else, I think.

Maybe it first referred to the drunken revelries of the Emperors of Rome but it's got extra force in Revelation; it's an image of the corruption that often comes near to the seat of power – what is it they say, 'power corrupts but absolute power corrupts absolutely' – we've seen corruption at work, haven't we?

Sometimes it's been blatant, when another list of cronies have been pardoned, or else it's hidden behind English reserve, and imagined, when rumours abound of untried companies being given huge contracts to supply PPE, whose directors are close to government ministers..

Sometimes it's brutal – like when Hong Kong pro-democracy supporters are rounded up by the police, or the Uighur people are interned by the thousand in China, or the Ugandan opposition leader's house is surrounded by government troops, or Alexander Navalny is arrested straight after landing on Russian soil.

In lots of places the 'Kings of the earth' – are fornicating with greed and power and self-aggrandisement (not, please God, in the US under Biden and Harris) – and in those places the inhabitants of their countries are reeling in their poverty or powerlessness or frustration as if they were drunk...too much wine..

Water into wine at Cana – we're inclined to take it as a good thing that Jesus transformed brackish water into good, high quality, wine in large quantities – I once told the story to make a point about God's abundance to a bunch of bikers at a wedding just before they went off to get right royally plastered.

I like a glass of red, me. We raise a glass of wine every month. But don't forget what wine symbolises – the blood of Christ. Remember, wine doesn't get massive endorsement in the Bible; remember it's often a sign of suffering. Remember, in Revelation it's the 'wine of fornication of the Kings of the earth' it's a sign of the drunken state of the people reeling under the weight of corruption. Remember, Cana is a sign – Jesus performs a sign – Jesus who later will say 'this cup - of wine – is the new covenant in my blood.

So don't forget about the jars containing life; don't forget all the hard work, the daily lives of the menders and makers of the world who made the jars; just as I can't forget about the millions of bottles and all the workers and worriers of the world who do all the hard, hidden work to get this miracle – *this miracle of life* – ready...

And don't forget the sign – wine = suffering; wine = blood.. Jesus died – and from the ground there blossoms red life that shall endless be...

['Everlasting arms'](#)

Lou Fellingham | National Methodist (virtual) Choir of Great Britain

### Words of Offering

Lord, we dedicate our gifts to you – hard though it is, still we are thankful in this world for all that you have given to us; the love we share; the gifts of time and money we have to use; a beautiful world and every opportunity that has come our way; despite all today's rigours we are thankful – most of all we thank you for Christ our Lord, and in Him and for Him and in the hope of His life in the world we give of ourselves in these and all our gifts.

### Intercessions

Today we can do nothing else but to pray for those in power. We begin with 'Be still and know that I am God' – and we'll return to it in the prayers and again at the end

['Be still and know that I am God'](#)

Cantus Firmus Trust

We thank God for the hopeful signs gathering around the administration of President Joe Biden and Vice President Kamala Harris; the peaceful, reconciling tone; the new openness to the world and to the challenges of the age – coronavirus, climate change to name but two.

We recognise that huge challenges lie ahead, to restore trust and build fractured relationships within and beyond the US, to tackle a pandemic that has wrought and still brings huge destruction, grief and suffering. Those few thoughts are enough to prompt us to pray for the P and V P, the Senators and Representatives, the huge number of government employees, as well as the bereaved, the unemployed, the disillusioned, the sick of mind and body. We pray for wisdom, patience, magnanimity and humility – and a recognition that – in the words of Amanda Gorman, the young poet who read at the inauguration "*There is always light, if only we're brave enough to see it. "If only we're brave enough to be it."*

['Be still and know that I am God'](#)

Cantus Firmus Trust

We entreat God as we continue to hear of anything but hope coming out of places like Russia, the Middle East, China, parts of Africa – imprisonment without trial; mass incarceration and persecution amounting to genocide; torture, media manipulation.

In many places rulers – 'kings of the earth' - use their power for their own ends – they enrich their friends; they impose savage restrictions on their people; they hide cold, unfeeling policies behind warm words. Those thoughts are enough to drive us to pray that dictators might fall; that corrupt officials might be held to account, that pliant employees might be prepared to do what's right.

We pray for justice, an outbreak of righteousness; a quickening of the consciences of the powerful and a restoration of the vision that Amanda Gorman pointed to in her poem at the Biden inauguration - *Scripture tells us to envision that everyone shall sit under their own vine and fig tree and no one shall make them*

*afraid. If we're to live up to our own time, then victory won't lie in the blade, but in all the bridges we've made. That is the promise to glade, the hill we climb, if only we dare.*

**'Be still and know that I am God'**

Cantus Firmus Trust

**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.*

**'Let There Be Peace on Earth'**

(Sy Miller & Jill Jackson) - UP Concert Chorus Dekada Ochenta 9

**Blessing**

**'Hold On'**

Lichfield Gospel virtual choir

Once again thanks to everyone who has made this service possible – Ian recording and processing; Nick & Tina printing and posting; Ken and Merry reading; Rachel sorting music and the Tyndale singers..singing – thank you one and all for taking part.

Best wishes, thoughts and prayers for another restricted week – please continue to pray for and support one another.as we all look forward with hopeful hearts – the days draw out and spring is not far away....

We meet to share a 'together though apart' time on Zoom from 11.30 am.