

Welcome to the worship of Tyndale Baptist Church as, once again, we gather 'together though apart'; in our homes, in a new routine of worship - which at least reinforces the truth that God is not confined to, nor defined by, the building in which we worship.

Nevertheless we are recording the service in the building, so that we can express some continuity with the long traditions of the church, which is just part of the much longer and wider tradition of Christian worship all around the world. Folk are prevented, now, from worshipping in buildings large and small, new and old, simple and ornate, everywhere.

Yet everywhere, we trust, they are discovering anew that God is with them wherever they may be. We hope you discover that as well, wherever you are, even as we reiterate a word of welcome to this worship in this place, for this time.

'Laudate Omnes Gentes' - praise, all people -

sung by Victoria Methodist Church

Call to worship

All people - all of us, whoever we are, whatever we're like, whatever we've done or not done - however it is for us - all people – are made by God who, in Christ, has saved our world; that's the truth of God's grace by which we are called and gathered as, in Jesus' name, we worship God

BPW 84 'Dear Lord and father of mankind'

St Laurence's Church Chorley and drone footage of Scotland

Opening Prayer

The peace and quietness of God's presence surrounds us as we meet to worship. Lord, with peaceful hearts we worship you; the purity and forgiveness of God in Christ fill us as we gather in worship – Lord, with hopeful hearts we worship you. The stillness and beauty of God's own Spirit touches us as we start to worship – Lord, with quieted hearts we worship you..

Around us the world reels in suffering, strives to overcome, strains with every memory of wrongs and tragedies endured; yearns to be set free, – yet in such a world we who name Christ's name would trust simply, would lead ordered lives, would listen out for the still small voice, would revel in your eternal silence – Lord, we worship you (silence)

Now, Lord, forgive us and restore us and breathe over us; bring us to places of calm and trust in a restless world – 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

CG 135 'To Christ the seed'

Mike Garnier

Responsive reading (from the Roman Catholic 'Litany of the Saints' – altd)

Lord, be merciful, **Lord, save your people.**

From every sin and evil power, **Lord, save your people.**

At the moment of death and beyond, **Lord, save your people.**

On the day of judgment, **Lord, save your people.**

By your coming amongst us, **Lord, save your people.**

By your suffering and cross, **Lord, save your people.**

By your death and rising to new life, **Lord, save your people.**

By your return in glory to the Father, **Lord, save your people.**

By your gift of the Holy Spirit, **Lord, save your people.**

By your coming again in glory, **Lord, save your people.**

Be merciful to us sinners, **Lord, save your people.**

'Amen Sikakudumisa'

Tyndale Virtual Singing Group

Reading : [Deuteronomy 18:15-20](#)

Reading : [Mark 1:21-28](#)

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.

Close to Holocaust Memorial Day, the focus of this sermon is authority.

In Nazi Germany malign forces were at work; gradually they spread across Europe and fed on old prejudices against Jews – till, at their height, they were virtually unstoppable – though never entirely unopposed – forces that worked through cadres of soldiers, networks of operatives in railway stations, signal boxes and marshalling yards, local organising committees, town halls and village councils – *and* churches (!) – Till, at the last, large populations – neighbours, colleagues, academics, artists, industrialists, scientists, housewives, fathers, children, grandparents – who had been living ordinary daily lives all over Germany, France, Poland, the Netherlands etc etc –

were hounded first into ghettos, then rounded up and transported, then dispatched to Auschwitz, Treblinka, Majdenek and other camps – death meted out on an industrial scale.

Amongst many sights that have stuck in my mind from a visit to Auschwitz in 1997 is one of a photograph – of families waiting to be 'processed' – mums and dads in smart coats and hats; children dressed up as for a family outing – an old lady resting, sitting on a suitcase; none of them exactly smiling, but looking intently at the camera, waiting, confused, fearing, hoping...if only they knew..

A single death, said Josef Stalin, is a tragedy, a million deaths is a statistic..

This week a milestone was passed in this country: some 100000 deaths from, or because of, coronavirus. Of course in sheer numbers its not comparable with the Holocaust; neither is it the same kind of thing – not any kind of organised, mass extermination. But behind the statistic, individual tragedies of lives lost in isolation, cut short, ringed with pain and fear.

The judgement of history will be about mistakes, unforeseen consequences, delays, successes – another page in the centuries-long tale of public health gains and losses. Not like Holocaust history, which is full of accounts of centuries-old pogroms and persecutions and suspicion and mounting hatred of the Jews, in which sadly, Christianity plays a large part – building towards a vile crescendo during Nazism.

Not the same at all..still, in this time, we are bound to look for connections. Perhaps one connection is *authority*.

Those 'malign forces' again - as a liberally-minded minister I only reluctantly consider the demonic; it's been galling to witness some parts of the church use language about demons and supernatural evil in connection with everything from lively children to mental illness to homosexuality. It's made some of us wary of anything to do with the supernatural at all.

Still – 'malign forces'. Some manifestations of evil go beyond what can be explained by careful analysis of all the facts. Maybe some people who said nothing while their neighbours were rounded up didn't do much wrong; maybe the town hall clerk who stamped travel papers or the charity worker who handed out shoes collected from Auschwitz inmates only turned a blind eye; maybe gardeners – the Auschwitz Birkenau camp is within sight of suburban houses – didn't take much notice of what was happening behind the fences.

But all this banality – the 'banality of evil', in Hannah Arendt's phrase - added up to feed the 'malign forces' that brought everything together till some six million Jews and others were systematically put to death.

Is the virus a 'malign force'? – not in and of itself, I think; it's just one more of the long list of viruses that have accosted the human population over centuries – but if you add the cover-up tendencies of officials in bureaucracies the world over; half-baked efforts to stop the spread; the rise of conspiracy theories; mismanaged policies and under-investment over decades; out-of-date PPE in run-down stockpiles, 'one rule for us, another for them' behaviour by rich elites and blinkered politicians... inequalities in health and welfare provision..

The banality of evil is compounded, pressed together, overflowing, reinforced, beyond rational explanation – malign forces at work in the world...

Which brings us to the story in Mark's gospel – Jesus teaching in the temple and calling out an 'unclean spirit'. Who knows what actual events lay behind the story; let's just say that the malign forces may not just be abstract sums of all evil, but personal and individual –

as if the malign forces at work in the world – in 1930's Europe or 2020s everywhere, that are compounded, pressed together, overflowing, reinforced, beyond rational explanation – sometimes seem to gather together in the personal, individual experience of very troubled, damaged, disturbed individuals..

Whatever..as far as the story is concerned, though, the main point is that Jesus taught and acted with *authority* – it's perhaps the chief insight of Mark's gospel; in a world of dis-ease and suffering and malevolence and 'evil' – Jesus showed a new authority.

It's what lies behind so many of the incidents in the gospel – many of them have more-than-surface significance – Jesus doesn't just heal and teach, he vanquishes demons; he overcomes evil spirits; he calms the storm, he sends the Gadarene swine plunging over a cliff; he multiplies food – and often the disciples do not understand, often the authorities question *his* authority – and gradually opposition builds against this divisive, choose-which-side-you-are-on figure and when he dies on the cross, as if by some mysterious power, Jerusalem the curtain of the temple was torn in two –

Authority – a power greater than all the malign forces at work in the world; the authority and power of God the maker of all things.

In the old days it was quite simple – you either spoke truly for God, in which case what you said came true, or you didn't – in which case you would be known as a false prophet because nothing you said made any difference to anything - Deuteronomy. By Jesus' time folk had largely stopped thinking like that.

There hadn't been any true prophets for 100s of years and the religious teachers claimed that all *their* authority derived from laws and traditions that *they themselves* had formed.

When folk saw Jesus, they saw a *new authority* at work – or, rather, they saw the *old* authority at work again – the authority of one who spoke and acted as if he and God were One..

So I'm thinking that in our day, as we mourn the loss of so many and live in bewilderment at the malign forces at work all around us – and as we remember that other time, not so very long ago, when evil stalked the earth and many millions lost their lives and remember, it's happening again, in China and Myanmar and..near to us, amongst refugees?

We are faced with a question – what authority do we recognise? – the authority of division and hatred and fear, of cover-up and neglect and warm words that achieve nothing? Or the authority of love and sacrifice and service and costly healing and dogged, determined opposition to the malign forces in the world that, despite great cost, achieves *everything*..?

remember, as Lent and Holy Week approach, Jesus spoke and lived 'as one who had authority', but such speaking and living cost him his life, before ever it brought him – and the world, and all who will follow his costly, divisive and authoritative way – to a new day...

BPW117 'By gracious powers'

Words of Offering

We offer ourselves in these and all our gifts with trembling hearts in such a world as this, still grateful for all that we have received, but painfully aware of all that has been lost and of much that has been given. As we offer, we name the name of Christ in this world and look, hopefully, to the coming of his peaceable Kingdom

Intercessions

We remain in silence as we remember and honour the many thousands of lives lost in this country during this pandemic, and the many more all around the world..(silence)

Lord, there are no words; there is only trust that the light that comes from you will shine and lead the way through this present darkness.

Lord in your mercy **Hear our prayer**

We remain in silence as we continue to think of all those known to us – we think of our families separated by distance; our friendships and relationships conducted only by phone and video; of loved ones struggling with illness and isolation...(silence)

Lord, we seek a word from you, as we trust once again in the Word that is a light to our feet and a lamp to every path

Lord in your mercy **Hear our prayer**

We remain in silence as we bring to mind those who are giving much, and others who are having to endure much, during this time: health workers stretched to the limit, politicians and officials having to make hard decisions; teachers feeling unprepared, parents at home with children, young people whose dreams are on hold; cooks, cleaners, drivers, shop, office, factory and site workers and so many others, whose daily lives are marked by risk and uncertainty...and any who have other-than-Covid trials of health or circumstance to face (silence)

Lord our own words give out in the face of all this; beyond anything we can say is the Word of life, the first and last. Help us to trust once again in Him

Lord in your mercy **Hear our prayer**

We offer these and all our prayers in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, amen.

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.

['Great is thy faithfulness'](#)

Cornerstone Presbyterian Church virtual choir

Blessing

So may the blessing of God Almighty, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, be with us and remain with us always,
Amen

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

For myself and on behalf of the Officers and Deacons, I wish you all well and, in this continued separation, assure you of our thoughts and prayers – please continue to pray for and support one another, as we all seek to continue to live by faith and look for hopeful signs in the world and from the source of all our hope...

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

['Shalom'](#) - Dan Forrest - Vocal Duet Version

written as a way to share peace with one another during the pandemic and racial injustices of 2020