

Notices

Good Morning, and welcome to our on-line service on this third Sunday of February. For those of you who don't know me I am Bruce Lloyd, one of the Church Secretaries here at Tyndale.

Our worship today is being conducted by our minister Michael Docker. I would like to thank him for leading us, and look forward to hearing God's message through his teaching and preaching.

Our Zoom coffee shop will take place as usual on Tuesday morning at 11.00 with the sign in details being able to be obtained through the Tyndale web site.

On Thursday evening at 7.30, again on Zoom, we will be holding another of Tyndale's fun evenings with 'Name ten things in 30 seconds'. Please come along to either have a go or to just scream answers at your screen. It would be good to see you and there will be a prize!

At the March Church Meeting the Annual Election of Deacons' will take place. To enable this to happen there will be both online voting and a postal voting system. More details of this will be given next week. We have three retiring Deacons and they are David Bell, Graham Lewis and Ian Waddington, and they are all eligible for re-election. We are entitled to 12 Deacons and we currently have a full Diaconate. If you wish to make a nomination please contact either myself or Denise Lewis and each nomination requires a proposal from two Church Members and obviously with the agreement of the nominee. All nominations need to be received by this Tuesday, the 23rd of February.

Many of you will be aware that our Community Minister, Rachel, is waiting to have surgery. This has been moved forward to this coming Thursday, 25th of February and we assure her of our thoughts and prayers at this time.

Welcome

Welcome once again to the worship of Tyndale Baptist Church at the start of Lent; the annual period running up to Holy Week and Good Friday when the Christian Church traditionally 'follows Jesus'; with acts of self-denial that express a penitent attitude, as Christians seek to align their lives more and more with the way of sacrificial love that, we believe, led Jesus to His cross.

It's a strange year to be doing Lent - in many ways the themes of loss and suffering and denial chime with the experience of our world during this pandemic, but just because we are *already* living greatly reduced and constrained lives it's unlikely that the Christian message will gain much traction. Still, those themes are of the warp and weft of the gospel - there is no good news without them; First Good Friday, and only then Easter day.

So, each week we will seek to journey with Jesus and you - whoever you are and whatever your experience or position in regard to organised religion - are very welcome to join us, as we seek the things of God, rejoice in those things and learn more of what it means to make them a part of our lives. All of which we will do in an atmosphere of worship - of God in Christ..

'Only by grace'

sung by Frodsham Methodist Church Cloud Choir

Call to worship

Grace surrounds us as we enter this time of worship - the grace of God; poured out into our lives and the world by Christ. Grace that calls us, grace that holds us; grace that alone is enough to keep us; this is God's promise - and in this we stand, as we worship

BPW 529 'From Heaven You Came'

Sung by the composer Graham Kendrick

Opening Prayer

King of the ages, Lord of all life, Sovereign of eternity, we worship you. We turn our thoughts from the things of earth that surround us – we would not be free of them but see them in a new light – toward you whose realm is above and beyond us, yet as near as our next breath to us - and we worship.

These things come together for us in Jesus, the Servant King, in whom the things of earth and the things of heaven combine in a life of love and service, a wisdom greater than the ages and a sacrifice finer than anything we can imagine – and there in Him, living, dying, and rising, we see you and your love lit up in glory by the light of eternity and by a never-ending promise - and we worship.

And we turn to seek your Spirit, to breathe the life of Christ in us and through us and among us, to turn the things of our world into heavenly thoughts and feelings and intentions – Lord, as we worship make us ready to serve the world in Christ's name, we pray, 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 20 'Clap your hands all you nations'

Tyndale virtual singers

Readings

[Genesis 9:8-17](#)

[Mark 1:9-15](#)

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 all on towards your Kingdom..Amen

So to Lent - and at the outset the conclusion of the story of the flood, for that wonderful picture of the rainbow.

How might we approach Lent in this extraordinary period (as I was saying last week)? Self-denial can seem a bit artificial and in a year when suffering and self-denial are just about everywhere it may 'lose its edge'.

So what about Lent this year? What about the rainbow...

I'm sure life would be much poorer without, occasionally, the glimpse of a rainbow. Derek, of blessed memory, once explained to me in great detail how rainbows are caused, why they are so unique and so on -

Refracted light...specific angles - water droplets, how you can't see the same rainbow twice and can't ever reach one; how rainbows are really full circles and that sometimes from an airplane you can see a whole one -

Then there's related phenomena, e.g. 'the glory' - I saw one once, high on the flanks of Snowdon, walking with a friend. Our shadows appeared on the surface of the cloud lying below us in the valley - huge, moving and eerie - the so-called 'Brocken spectre'

Then, for a minute, our shadows were surrounded by a *glory* - all the colours of the rainbow.

A wonderful natural phenomenon, the rainbow; the subject of myth and story-telling in all kinds of cultures, from Nordic mythology to Irish legends and lots of others - pots of gold, heavenly bridges, etc, etc...

All those colours - all that beauty - all that harmony - a sign of how things could be, perhaps - no wonder rainbows have been used in many flags and movements, from South Africa's 'Rainbow Nation' after apartheid, to the symbol of LGBTQ Pride marches round the world

And in Genesis, after all the destruction of the flood and the emergence of Noah and his family blinking into the daylight of a new age - the rainbow - and the promise of God:

'When I bring clouds over the earth and the bow is seen in the clouds, I will remember my covenant that is between me and you and every living creature of all flesh; and the waters shall never again become a flood..'

How about that at the start of Lent - before all the suffering and hardships ahead - in the midst of all today's suffering and hardships - over all, through all and in all, the rainbow..

God's 'never again'...See, I think what this world needs more than anything else is...grace..

There's not much else, is there? So much has been lost...so much is still being endured...so much - who knows - is yet to come: who'd have thought a year ago we'd still be in the midst of all this? What was said in the Spring of last year? 'Send it packing by Christmas...really?

Never again..see, I think we need something other than fear - Project Fear? Brexiteers were scathing. No one wants to be ruled by fear...

Part of the problem with Track and Trace has been all the people who won't use the app in case they get notified and have to self-isolate...and then what?....fear..

Same with Climate Change. Partly no one wants to do much about it because they can't see it's making much difference..They can see in the Maldives, the Himalayas, or Siberia, but you can't see in Bristol, much..

And partly no one wants to do much about it because the only thing anyone can tell you is what will happen if you don't...fear - rising sea levels, extreme weather; melting glaciers - fear

Have you seen 'It's a Sin' - a story set in the early 80s at the start of the Aids pandemic? No one wanted to stop having a high old time - at least in part because the government campaign - I remember it, do you? - crashing tombstones, thunder and lightning, a deep John Hurt voice-over.."don't die of ignorance"...fear

But.. *not* fear at the start of Lent..we know a hard road lies ahead - we know Jesus ends up on a cross; we know what it means for his followers - you and me! - still, not, please God, fear..

Have you heard about 'nature-based-solutions'? It's the coming thing, I gather.

If you want the government to award your business a grant in the future you will have to demonstrate that your project or product is based on or contains a - 'nature-based-solution'

The idea is gaining ground that we've made such a mess of the planet - of nature - plastics in the seas, landfill everywhere, air pollution, global warming, you name it -

That we're going to have to find new solutions to our problems - nature-based solutions, as they're called - new ways of building, driving, farming... And 're-wilding' - more and more land left so that nature can claim it back, can 'take its course'

At first sight, the rainbow is part of this - a natural sign - goodness in the sky - but the harsh fact is that human beings have never been able *just* to let nature take its course;

they have always sought - *had* - to control and use nature - and they'll need to do so again, in spades, if ever climate change is going to be tackled and human life can flourish.

The Bible fact is, the rainbow isn't a sign of nature's goodness, for all its beauty - it's a sign of God's goodness.

It only helps us if it reminds us that over all things, before all things - at the start of Lent, through our suffering and beyond even this pandemic - is not nature - the coronavirus comes from nature - it's God

The rainbow is a sign, over which God speaks, 'I have set my bow in the clouds, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth' - God's grace, see..

Some commentators think we should see the rainbow not just as a pretty light in the sky, but as an image of a bow of war undrawn -

In this scenario, the flood is God's weapon of choice - his 'bow of war'; his punishment meted out to the whole of creation because of the wickedness of humanity -

And after the flood - the rainbow - the bow of war at rest - never again will God punish the creation; never again will all creatures be destroyed...never again..

Oh I know there are lots of questions - about God punishing; about what could we have done so bad that deserved such destruction - about what kind of a God this is in the first place -

But leaving them to one side for the moment, let's just take the sign - the rainbow, the bow undrawn- as a sign of God's 'never again' - of God's grace..

And take it as a promise for all time; *not* of the goodness and beauty of nature - (good and beautiful though it is) but of the goodness and beauty of God towards us - *never again*..God's grace..

Because there's something else. When God sees the rainbow he will *remember his covenant* - how about that; God seeing the rainbow and remembering what he had promised - and us seeing it and remembering as well..

I like that image - God *remembering* - it's a feature of the Noah story - when all is destroyed except Noah and his entourage adrift on a vast sea - lost, to all intents and purposes - God *remembers* -

It's a vital part of our lives isn't it, to remember - saddest aspect of Alzheimer's, that someone can't remember

How about this for reassurance then - *God remembers* - we are not lost, not forgotten, never cast adrift on a raging sea of uncertainty. In a pandemic or at any other time - God remembers

That is, whenever he sees the sign of the rainbow, God remembers - I should think rainbows are pretty common, aren't they? Always, somewhere, there're clouds, and water droplets, and sunlight - and rainbows

And every time God remembers...how about that? How about the constancy, frequency and *abundance* of that - not an occasional infrequent sign like a volcano or a hurricane or even an annual sign like the spring flowers - but a constant, frequent sign - the rainbow -

I think this is really all about time - 'to everything there is a time and a season', the famous words in Ecclesiastes - perhaps once there was a time for a flood, for God's punishment of wickedness - or at least, perhaps there was a time when that was what people understood of God,

But no longer...But never again. When Noah came out of the ark with his family, it was a time for rejoicing, for new life, for beginning once more; it was a time for rainbows.

Perhaps when we emerge, as surely we will, from this pandemic time - and we don't know when, but what a reminder *that is* that all times are in God's hands... - then it will be a time for rainbows - for a sign that will be seen by God so that he will remember - his promise - never again....

That's grace, I think. That's the sign at the beginning of this Lent. The God of the universe shackled to his creation so much that when he sees a sign in that creation (the rainbow) God remembers

But Lent isn't Old Testament; it's New Testament; it's because of Jesus..

Mark's gospel - those few verses at the beginning that sets the whole thing on its way; the end of the age of darkness and deathliness and the coming into the world of the new age, symbolised by the passing of John and the beginning of the powerful ministry of Jesus - here to announce, proclaim & demonstrate the new age -

a new sign, if you like, in the creation - Jesus the One who came, as a sign that God has not forgotten.

However hard the road is, or the road ahead may be, for Jesus, for us...:grace..grace first and always..

'The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news.'

Oh, yes - and when we see the sign (the rainbow? Jesus?) will we remember?

'Because He lives, I can face tomorrow'

Prayers for Covid-19, Brazil

Words of Offering

BPW 604 'Father of Glory whose heavenly plan'

Tune by Sarah Dodds. Words by Keith Clements

Intercessions

This Sunday has been designated 'Student Sunday' - we'll use a prayer written for the occasion in a moment, but it gives us an opportunity this week to focus our thoughts and prayers on children and young people, whose suffering through all this is of a particular kind. So we pray..

We pray for young children, who are getting bored and restless at home; whose parents are struggling, who are missing friends and stimulation, whose teachers are bound to be feeling torn, whose lives are 'on hold' Lord, we ask only that as your Spirit works its reconciling work, families with young children will rediscover the joys of love through all the difficulties of each day - we pause in quiet to think of those known to us...

Lord, in your mercy **Hear our prayer**

We pray for teenagers, for whom the world that should be opening up is closing down; whose parents feel ill-equipped to provide all they need, who may be subject to the temptations and dangers of the on-line world, who can't make or who struggle to keep friendships and relationships, who are suffering from lack of exercise and anxiety about their 'learning and living future'.

Lord, we ask only that as your Spirit broods over the darkness all around; families with teenagers will find ways to express the joys of love through the rigours of each day - we pause in quiet to think of those known to us...

Lord, in your mercy **Hear our prayer**

We pray for young people who are longing to start out on careers, spread their wings and explore the mixed blessings of work, whose lives are on hold, whose plans are stymied, whose dreams are turning into nightmares, who want to go, but can only stay..

Lord, we ask only that as your Spirit breathes life into every dry place, families with young people will discover afresh the joys of love through the limitations of each day. We pause in quiet to think of those known to us...

Lord, in your mercy **Hear our prayer**

We pray for all who teach, in universities, colleges and schools, who must quickly adapt to new ways of working; who do their best to maintain relationships at a distance, who must take hard decisions and face particular risks, whose own careers are under pressure, for whom the joys and challenges of classroom, lecture theatre and common room are, for now, out of reach..

Lord, we ask only that as your Spirit works in hearts and minds, teachers, administrators - indeed all who work - will discover afresh what love means where they are - we pause in quiet to think of those known to us...

Lord, in your mercy **Hear our prayer**

A prayer for students - from SCM

Loving God, who knows all we will ever learn and holds all we will ever forget: bless, inspire and encourage all students. In the time of the pandemic, sustain them. In times they are overwhelmed, comfort them and in times of discovery give them joy. Where learning is restricted by poverty or gender we pray for your justice to come, bringing down systems of inequality and subverting individual barriers. Teach us to be students of your astounding grace, that we may see more of your Kingdom on earth.

Lord, in your mercy **Hear our prayer**

We offer these and all our prayers in Jesus' name, 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.

CG 138 'We cannot measure how you heal'

sung by Joy and Ruth Everingham

Benediction

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; Dave & Debbie reading; Rachel sorting music, Sarah and Keith for music and words; Tyndale singers singing– thank you one and all for taking part.

We are mindful that, as Christians, we do not endure these current restrictions alone. Our Christian fellowship means that we pray for & support one another, as we all seek to continue to live by faith and journey through Lent towards Holy Week and Good Friday.

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