

Notices

Good Morning, and welcome to Tyndale on this last Sunday of August. If you are a visitor with us here at Tyndale or online, I extend a special warm welcome and hope you feel at home with us.

Our worship is being conducted by our minister Michael Docker. I would like to thank him for leading us, and look for a greater understanding of God's message for us.

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

Last week you were advised to keep Saturday 11th September free. On that day we will be holding a lunchtime gathering outside on the forecourt from 12 noon until 2pm when burgers, hotdogs and refreshments will be served. This social event is aimed at re-engaging the whole fellowship of Tyndale, enabling us to look forward together to a brighter future.

In preparation for this, next Saturday there will be a working party between 9 and 11am to weed and tidy the outside for the following week. Please come along if you are free and able.

Thank you.

Welcome

Welcome to the worship of Tyndale Baptist Church, whether you're here in church, on-line or following the script. As we continue to make our way through what can seem like a grim world we are challenged once again to live by faith, and so we gather, in the hope and promise of God's love, shining in the face of Jesus Christ

'Speak O Lord, as we come to you'

Stuart Townend

Call to worship

This is the place and this is the time; here and now, God calls, God promises, God purposes

to open our minds, to change our lives, to challenge our ways;

to make us see the world God loves and the whole of life in the light of Christ:

to show the hope, joy and peace that He brings into the world.

This is the place as are all places; this is the time as are all times.

Here and now let us praise God

CG2 'Abundant life'

Opening Prayer

In the presence of God we worship: God's life is the power that moves us and God's Son is the life that continues to inspire us – on this day we seek a fresh encounter with God's Spirit, to challenge us and change us and show us the reality of God's Love –

Lord God, we worship you, even as the turning world throws up new challenges and sufferings. We can't pretend to be more than human - weak and ordinary people; so we don't come offering you anything more than our frail hearts and our desire to follow where you lead, but we do come trusting, looking, and waiting for any and every sign of your work in us and in the world – even this world, where many endure great loss – still, it is your world, and we worship you as we proclaim that you hold us and all that is made in the palm of your hand and in the surety of your love – Lord God help us, and accept our worship, and fill us once again with your Spirit.

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 21 'Christ be our light'

Reading [Song of Solomon 2.8-13](#)

'Beauty for brokenness'

Graham Kendrick

Reading [James 1.17-27](#)

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.

Somewhere in the heart of the Old Testament is the Song of Songs.

Right in the middle of that mix of warfare, kings, prophets; battles, empires, sacrifices, temples, exiles, burning bushes & fiery furnaces is the Song of Songs – a love poem...

Out of place, really. What's it doing here? Why, with lots of stories from an austere 'Cecil B DeMille' age - dust, chariots & horses, swords & stuff; armour, robes, stone tablets, city walls, sheep & shepherds & nomads

you can almost see Charlton Heston, can't you? Long flowing beards & – can't you just feel the heat, the dust, the flies, the camels? Why in the middle of all this is there a love-poem?

I've been to Egypt.. I've seen the shimmering mountains, the endless sands; felt the searing sun & the blistering heat; seen people in dusty robes, kuffiyah pulled tight round their faces –

That's the OT, isn't it? The heat of Afghanistan is much the same; imagine how uncomfortable those fleeing people must be in their desperation & fear outside Kabul airport

What's the Song of Songs doing in the middle of all this, then?

The flowers appear on the earth; the time of singing has come, and the voice of the turtledove is heard in our land.

How does that square with desert emptiness, barren wastes...?

My beloved is like a gazelle or a young stag. Look, there he stands behind our wall,

How does that measure up in a world of swords and armour and long beards?

And why, when on page after page the word of God is all about burning sacrifices and dry bones and pillars of fire, is there *bang in the middle* an ode to love?:

My beloved speaks and says to me: "Arise, my love, my fair one, and come away; for now the winter is past, the rain is over and gone...."

Religion gets a bad press today, doesn't it? Taleban terrorising; fundamentalist conspiracising and often Christian *fantasising* about what God may be doing –

We Baptist ministers received a pastoral letter recently – rambling and not very pastoral at all, if you ask me,

But early on in the letter, in a section bemoaning the parlous state of things in the churches at the moment, came this sentence 'God has pulled back the curtain on our reality'.

I've thought about it a lot since – the idea that God – the God of the universe – should 'pull back the curtain' – should, in any respect, be active amongst Christians

The letter doesn't say anything particularly controversial about what God is doing; it's the very idea that God – the God of the universe – might be doing *anything* for we few...

That we can even dare speak, in a world where people maunder without hope in a Kabul street or a destroyed Haitian village, of God *doing anything* for folk in a few churches...

I think the job of living by faith today is to try and discern what God might be doing, if anything, not just among a few nice Christians in a few churches, but in the *whole world*.

The world can be very bleak, can't it? Afghanistan; *Haiti* – one woman was in church – *in church; praising God, expecting God to be there, to be active* when the earthquake struck and the wall collapsed on her baby daughter, killing her outright – *in church...in church....?!!*

I read about a young Afghan gay man in Kabul, cowering in his home, praying *please* that the Taleban won't come knocking – they've already killed his boyfriend...

I think we have to be very careful talking about the activity of God in such a world – very *humble* if we dare to invoke God's name.

Not very religious. Not full of what we think God is doing. Not just hearers of the word – James - *be doers of the word & not merely hearers who deceive themselves*.

Who deceive themselves. I think, sometimes, that's what we do when we talk about God being active...we *deceive ourselves*..

Not for us to say that God's *not* active, but if in half the world folk *in the midst* of misery are wondering if God can possibly exist those who *do* believe in God should be humble...James:

If any think they are religious & do not bridle their tongues but deceive their hearts, their religion is worthless.

In a world overflowing with religion you can't blame folk for deciding - much of it is *worthless*

Special pleading; claiming too much for itself; seeking to make the world in its image; condemning the world – frankly that sort of religion is worthless..I think..

Yet...bang in the middle of all the austerity of the OT, an ode to love – good ol’ fashioned, lip-smacking, heart-pumping, loin-curdling *love* –

The voice of my beloved! Look, he comes, leaping upon the mountains, bounding over the hills. My beloved is like a gazelle or a young stag

Imagine the gay man in Kabul echoing such words – that young woman in Haiti when she was getting pregnant – *love*!!.

They say that S of So is pretty earthy, bordering on the pornographic in the original – yet given a place of special honour in Judaism.

A Rabbi: *'All of eternity in its entirety is not as worthy as the day on which Song of Songs was given to Israel, for all the Writings are holy, but Song of Songs is the Holy of Holies.*

Love.. read and honoured down all the Christian centuries...*love* – Now one of the most important texts for a feminist reading of Scripture – *love*

Human love, in all its fierce beauty & power. S of So often read as an allegory of the love of God for his people in Judaism, for the love of Christ for his Church in Christianity.

Probably because for centuries good religious folk couldn't cope with an erotic love poem bang in the hearts of their Scripture, but also, perhaps, *because the height of human love and passion gives a glimpse into the love and passion in the heart of God*

Bang in the middle. *That's what the S of So is doing here.* No matter how grim things get in Afghanistan, in Haiti, in post-Brexit Britain for that matter; in our lives – no matter how deep the grief, how great the agonies, how sharp the desperation – *love* – human love as a pale shadow of the love of God

Bang in the middle of all the austerity, a vision of human beauty & sensuality, like a Coco Chanel dress & a pair of Manolo Blahnik shoes on a Kabul street –

Please God that there might be the freedom to do such things again..

But did you notice? (in the verse before so you probably didn't) who this love-poem is addressed to (by the way, thanks Ruth, for reading: not easy to read a love-poem in church!)

In the verse before it's addressed to – 'daughters of Jerusalem',

Daughters of Jerusalem. We've heard it before, haven't we? Jesus, on his way to the cross through the streets of the city - *Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me, but weep for yourselves and for your children.*

Daughters of Jerusalem; let them stand for all the women down the years who've watched their sons go to war, mourned their dead, wailed & wept at the grimness of the world;

pulled their robes tight about them & cowered from the world's violence – as women have done in every age, in every city – Jerusalem to Rio de Janeiro, Kabul to Cairo, Bethlehem to Birmingham to Bristol,

Daughters of Jerusalem – the women of the world; witnesses to crosses & wounds & losses and *love*

Love.. bang in the middle of all this grimness – the love of God, shining in the face of the cross-killed King who lives for ever.

And we don't need to worry if God is active on the streets of Kabul or in the villages of Haiti or in the churches of the Western world – of course He is active – he is giving us Christ

we don't need to deceive ourselves into following some kind of overblown, over-confident, over-reaching religion.

We only need *one* kind of religion – James tells us –

Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to care for orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world.

Or, we might say, because we have Christ, we have God's love *in the midst* – let that be our religion – *love...*

Words of Offering

Lord we come to you; we cannot but help reel at the grim news from parts of the world, even as love of life leaps in our hearts at the beauty of much of the world; so we come humbly, not claiming too much for ourselves and we come openly, confessing our frailties and barrenness and we come expectantly, for we have been frequently renewed by your constant, faithful and passionate love for us, shining in the face of Jesus Christ and as we come we give of ourselves in these and all our gifts, humbly, openly, expectantly, thankfully, believing that this world and our lives are held for ever in the palm of your hand.

The 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.

'Streets of the city'

Stuart Townend

Intercessions:

Sometimes, silence is best, as we try to hold together the grimness of the world, the frailties of our lives, our sometimes tenuous hold on the life of faith, and the often unseen but always promised and purposed love of God in Christ

Times of silence - and the response

Lord Hear us, **Lord graciously hear us**

For the people of Afghanistan; for those still mired in fear, desperation & misery; for those trying to help, for those whose first resort is to violence, for those worried about families and friends; for those whose work has been destroyed; for those for whom the future looks bleak.

We remain in silence..

Lord Hear us **Lord graciously hear us.**

For the people of Haiti; for those still in agony and awaiting rescue or overwhelmed by grief, loss and destruction; for those trying to help; for those in despair

We remain in silence..

Lord Hear us **Lord graciously hear us.**

For others around the world – in Hong Kong, in Tigray in Ethiopia; in many places where Covid 19 still rampages; wherever life is grim and hope in short supply

We remain in silence..

Lord Hear us **Lord graciously hear us.**

For ourselves and those we love – separated; wishing we could be together; so much that remains unsaid; so many memories and hopes for the future..

We remain in silence..

Lord Hear us **Lord graciously hear us.**

That there might be peace in our time, that there might be healing in our world; that there might be justice and an end to poverty; that there might be joy in a beautiful world; that we might be not merely hearers, but also doers of the word; that we might trust again in God's love for us and for the whole world in Christ

We remain in silence..

Lord Hear us **Lord graciously hear us.**

We offer these and all our prayers in Christ's name, amen.

BPW 623 'God of freedom'

Blessing

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

Thanks to everyone who has made today's service possible: Ian recording and processing; Nick printing and posting; Rachel sorting music and playing with Ali and Dave, Tyndale singers singing; Ruth and Debbie reading; the Stewarding Team preparing, watching over us, and cleaning up after – thanks everyone for taking part.

The 'new start' of the autumn is soon upon us. We are making preparations for further stages of 'opening up' - cautiously – but however much we are or are not able to participate in the 'physical' manifestation of the church, we hope you will continue to support one another and to live by faith in the world & thus to participate in the mystery of the Body of Christ on earth.