

Notices

Good morning and a warm welcome to worship here at Tyndale. Whether you are here in person, watching from home, or simply following the script you are all most welcome and we hope you are able to feel part of our worship here this morning. Our service is being led by our Minister Rev Michael Docker.

On Tuesday we have our Coffee Shop, here in the Church, from 10am until 12noon. Do come along and enjoy refreshments and conversation if you can.

Wednesday evening sees our Time@Tyndale, again here in the church. This week you are invited to bring a favourite piece of music or poetry. Do come along even if you don't have an item to share. The evening starts with refreshments at 7.30pm.

On Thursday morning at 11 am we have our online coffee shop time. Sign in details can be obtained through the church website. Thank you

Welcome

Welcome to the worship of Tyndale Baptist Church – here in the building, on-line or following the script. Welcome as, together, we seek after God and the things of God and – with our hearts and lives in the midst of a barren, suffering world, we worship..

'Give thanks with a grateful heart'

Tyndale singers and music group

Call to Worship

We come seeking; we come maybe with empty, aching hearts, or maybe we come with hearts full of gratitude; we come seeking God's forgiveness for we are not all that we should be – still we come – we are called here, and there's nowhere else and no time else where we can go to find the things of God – and as we come so we worship, in Jesus' name.

BPW 54 'Let all the world'

Opening Prayer

Lord God we come before you as we are; touched for good or ill by our lives in the world this week; in work, leisure, relationships, encounters with the natural world – Lord in and through it all we worship you; whose good world this is; made free of fear, created various and rich; filled with everything we need – Lord we praise you for all that you have made –

& as the ripples of creation spread out through the universe, as the faintest of those ripples reaches earth and are detected, so we detect the ripples of your love spreading all around us – not faint, but strong in Christ – though maybe faintly detected by us in our frailty; Father forgive us for not being more attune to the wonders of your love & not more ready to echo that love in our lives

We wait on your word in Christ

(Pause)

Who spoke to the little group of ordinary folk that followed him 'Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the Kingdom'

Lord, we are thankful and we will not be afraid – as we make our way through this sometimes barren and difficult world we will follow you in Christ; help us to keep our eyes on Him and on the Kingdom that is ours in Christ.

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

'The truth that sets us free'

John Bell/Tyndale singers and music group

'He came down that we might have life'

Tyndale singers and music group

Reading: [Numbers 21:4-9](#)

Reading: [John 3:1-15](#)

Sermon

Lord we give you this time; may speech be true; may hearing and understanding be Spirit-breathed & may deciding lead to action that mends the world

'Let your poison be your cure', from Louis McNeice's poem about sea-sick sailors going to sea again the sea that's brought them so much suffering, that's been their poison, is *all they know* – go to the poisonous sea once again, says the poem, and let it be your cure.

Like the Hebrews following Moses – Numbers - The people spoke against God & against Moses, '*Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? For there is no food & no water, & we detest this miserable food.*' (Sounds like post-Brexit Britain to me..!!)

Then the LORD sent poisonous serpents among the people, & they bit the people, so that many Israelites died. The word for poisonous serpents is 'seraphim' – you know – angels of God, messengers – 'cherubim & seraphim may have gathered round' (In the Bleak Midwinter)

Here they're angels of death – messengers sent from God to destroy the 'moaning Israelites'. "You followed Moses for freedom, you asked for food in the wilderness (Numbers = 'In the wilderness' in Hebrew) you don't like it, now? Suck it up! You think God will be mocked? I am God & I will be who I will be & I can give life & I can take it away....

in the wilderness... that's where we're starting... Today we are in the wilderness. Not just in the church; though like many an institution this church has suffered - been reduced.

The world is in the wilderness. *This country* is in the wilderness (boosterish speeches notwithstanding)

Shortages of goods, services & staff; rising prices; failing businesses, mass culls of livestock – this Christmas better than the last, hopefully, but that's not saying much is it?

The wilderness. & our lives? How are *they* working out? OK, maybe not us in here, but close enough; mental illness rates rising; hospital waiting lists growing longer; more folk plunging into poverty – the 5th richest country in the world & millions have to rely on foodbanks....

I'd better stop before I begin to sound political. I'm not political, though; I have no answers..

Unless....*those snakes* (seraphim!!). What did Moses do? He made a bronze serpent on a pole & whenever anyone was bitten by a seraphim!, they looked at it and were cured..

Let your poison be your cure..it's vaccination, isn't it? My perfunctory medical understanding is that vaccinations use a tiny amount of the virus that makes you ill & by all kinds of scientific magic (it's not magic, I know; it's hard work & great expertise) it's injected & it makes you better – or stops you getting ill, or some such...vaccination..

Nicodemus, the elite member of the establishment, came to Jesus *by night*..

beginning to have his doubts, perhaps – doubts about the whole, creaking, kow-towing system; about the failed state of Israel (!!) trying to make peace by appeasing the Romans –

And, I imagine, some of those *leaders* – members of the *Sanhedrin* – *Pharisees* (*scapegoat bogeymen if ever there were some*) – were making a fast buck in the process - dodgy deals; corruption in high places; jobs for the boys; contracts not worth the papyrus they were written on..treaties signed and trashed the next day....

Oops...getting political again...and maybe I'm reading too much into it, but can't you just imagine what might have driven someone like Nicodemus to come to Jesus *by night*..?

I reckon he was in the wilderness. I reckon Israel was..I reckon in Jesus' day, whether it was an outcast leper, an abused prostitute, someone 'possessed' (serious mental health issues, probably), a lame man lying all day by a so-called healing pool, crowds hanging on Jesus' every word, - just about everyone, everywhere, was in the wilderness.

Today, when we're in the wilderness, first one many turn to is a politician, perhaps a populist, to save them – promising sunlit uplands; promising to level up or build back better, ...sorry, politics again..

Or they turn to self help - a Gwyneth Paltrow candle, or a nostalgia-fest – the new version of The Darling Buds of May: Pop Larkin & his eccentric family in 1950's Kent, when everything was simpler & the sun always shone & the good wore tank tops & the bad wore sharp suits..

In the wilderness..but maybe the shortages, the waiting lists & the changing climate are *seraphim*.. messengers of God; maybe, today (by all accounts more and more, especially young people - are looking on-line for religious services of all kinds (even Tyndale's?)) –

in the wilderness there are more and more messages from God: 'poisonous', painful messages, each in their way reminding us of the frailty of our human condition.

This is not some new fundamentalism. I'm not arguing that the current state of the world is evidence of how far we have moved away from God & things won't get better until the churches are full again & most of the population can be found Sunday by Sunday sitting under this or that preacher & then the sun will shine....

No. But I *am* arguing that our wilderness – our world's wilderness or the wilderness of our hearts – are full of *messages* to remind us of our frailty as human beings *and* of the need *not* to look to politics or populists or 'influencers' or self-help gurus or dreams of yesteryear..

Not to look to any of those things, but to..Jesus speaks to Nicodemus, who, as often happens in John's gospel, fails to understand what Jesus means, so he elaborates;

& he talks about spirit & wind & heavenly things & then says, '*just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.*

See? Let your poison be your cure. The Son of Man like a seraphim of God – the *human being Jesus* like a seraphim of God

What's your poison? Your humanity is – it's mired in sin, mental health problems, greed, hubris, politics; it's biting you, your humanity – leading you into a wilderness of getting-and-spending & pollution & corruption & populism & nostalgia, but *Jesus...Jesus* –

Is the human being who displays his humanity fully, and humbly, when He is lifted up on the Cross. And there, because of his sacrifice, his life of faith and, ultimately, because of his triumph over death – is your cure.

Don't look anywhere else, says the Christian gospel – all you need to know about God you can find in Jesus the human being who died on a Cross – all you need, of love, of forgiveness, of life itself -

So follow him; imitate him, make his 'living of human life' like your 'living of human life' and set out again, through the wilderness of this world and of your lives –

Because it's all we know - - so let your poison be your cure...

'I will be who I will be', says God – and I will be in Jesus - and whoever believes in him may have eternal life

Prayer of Offering

Lord we come to you; we are frail and weak and before your grace and mercy we would be humble; we recognise that we live in a world that too often has been allowed to become a wilderness, of poverty, pollution, injustice and destruction – and too often we have gone along with it – said nothing or done nothing or failed to make things better. But we come to you once more and give of ourselves in these and all our gifts so that here and now and for every day that is to come we might see the world and our lives changed and filled with your love and turned to Christ

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.

BPW 282 'Breath on me breathe of God'

Prayers of Intercession

Using an ancient Byzantine liturgy to reflect on today's world as we pray..

For the peace of the world, that a spirit of respect & forbearance may grow among nations and peoples – as we think of the Yemen, Syria, parts of Africa, Afghanistan and elsewhere – a moment of silence..

let us pray to the Lord.

Lord, have mercy.

For the holy Church of God, that it may be filled with truth & love & be found without fault at the day of your coming - as we acknowledge our part in that Church and its place in a multi-faith world – a moment of silence –

let us pray to the Lord.

Lord, have mercy.

For those in positions of public trust, that they may serve justice and promote the dignity and freedom of all people - as we are aware of issues for the Police, the NHS, Westminster and other institutions – a moment of silence

let us pray to the Lord.

Lord, have mercy.

For a blessing upon the labours of all, and for the right use of the riches of creation – as we witness upheaval and shortages and struggle with climate change – a moment of silence

let us pray to the Lord.

Lord, have mercy.

For the poor, the persecuted, the sick, and all who suffer; for refugees, prisoners, and all who are in danger, that they may be relieved and protected – as we know about pressures on medics, about grief and loss, about unfair treatment and injustice – moment of silence

let us pray to the Lord.

Lord, have mercy.

For this community; for those who are present, and for those who are absent, that we may be delivered from hardness of heart and show forth your glory in all that we do – as we bring the people of this church to mind, and think of others near and far – a moment of silence

let us pray to the Lord.

Lord, have mercy.

For our enemies and those who wish us harm; and for all whom we have injured or offended - as we struggle with fairness, against prejudice, and for the right treatment of all – a moment of silence –

let us pray to the Lord.

Lord, have mercy.

For all who have died in the faith of Christ, that, with all the saints, they may have rest in that place where there is no pain or grief, but life eternal - as we bring our loved ones to mind and pray for ourselves – a moment of silence.

let us pray to the Lord.

Lord, have mercy.

BPW 566 To God be the glory

Blessing

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

Thanks everyone who has made today's service possible. We go into another week, determined to trust again in the vision of God's Kingdom and to live with that vision in today's world – always mindful of each other and committed to pray and do the right – until we meet again.