

## Welcome & Notice

Good morning and a very warm welcome to our service today, whether you are here in person or online, or indeed a visitor, we hope you will feel at home with us.

Our service this morning is being led by our minister Michael Docker, and we thank him for leading our worship, and look forward to sharing this time together.

As usual, Tuesday coffee shop will be taking place this week, from 10am until 12 noon here in the sanctuary. Do come along and enjoy this time of refreshments and conversation.

On Wednesday night at time@tyndale, we will be having our monthly communion service, which will be led by Michael Docker. Refreshments are served from 7.30pm, with the communion starting at 8pm. The week after at time@tyndale on the 30th March, we will welcome Ann Tarr, who will be speaking on Christians Against Poverty. Do come along to both evenings if possible, as we come together and share communion this week, and enjoy a discussion and thought provoking evening the week after.

On Thursday we have our online coffee shop, which starts at 11am. The details of how to join this time of informal chat are on our website.

A notice for all our church members in advance of next month's Church meeting on 19th April. The meeting will include the Deacons election, with Michael Whitfield, Dorette Morgan, Margaret Clements and Rachel Molyneux eligible for re-election. Michael Whitfield has indicated to us though that he feels it is the right time to stand down from being a Deacon. Michael, we thank you for your commitment, wisdom and help throughout your time as a Deacon, you will be greatly missed. We therefore have 3 Deacons who are eligible for re-election, and 1 spare place as well. Bruce and I have the nominations forms available. If you would like to nominate a member to become a deacon, please firstly ask them if they would like to become a deacon again, or for the first time, and then get a completed form back to Bruce or myself with the required signatures by Sunday 3rd April.

Finally, Brian and Eileen are celebrating their 60th Wedding Anniversary on the 31st of March, when they were married here at Tyndale by our minister then, Ron Cowley. Today they would like to celebrate this happy occasion with all their friends at Tyndale. They have provided a cake for us all to enjoy after the service, where tea and coffee will be served as well, so do stay and enjoy this time after the service, to celebrate with them both. Thank you.

As the world continues to reel from the destruction and death in Ukraine and as who-knows-what stresses and strains lodge in the hearts of many people, we meet again to lift our hearts into the presence of God – of course we have questions, and we long for the day when once again peace will be seen – and maybe everything that's happening has brought doubts to the surface for us, but here we meet in the mystery of the One who is above and beyond all such things – and yet very close to such things as well – we do not just meet to worship some remote, high, far away god, but we meet in the presence of the God who has come to us in Jesus – and knows our needs and our weaknesses, and loves us still..

**'All who are thirsty come to the well'**

### Call to Worship

Our hunger for peace and our thirst for justice are, at heart, a hunger and thirst for the life of God – that we long to see in our lives and in the world. God is here, we believe, in Christ, to meet us in our need, to hold us through each day, to save us and to bring us new life – and in his name, we worship...

**BPW529 'The servant king'**

### Opening Prayer

Lord God, we worship you; higher than our highest thoughts, greater than our greatest imaginings – beyond anything of which we can conceive, and yet at the same time close – as close as our next breath – to the lives we live now, in Christ Jesus. He brings us your life; he shows us your forgiveness; he lives for ever by your power; he has acted to save us with a love beyond all loves. Your Spirit moves us to come before you and broods over this sad and suffering and yet glorious world, to bring life out of death and to replace hatred with love at every turn

Lord, we turn to you again; our lives are less than they should be; our ways are earth-bound and frail, our thoughts are limited by what we have become; we confess....

We wait on your word (pause in quiet)...the word of God in Isaiah the prophet:

*Seek the LORD while he may be found, call upon him while he is near; let the wicked forsake their way, and the unrighteous their thoughts; let them return to the LORD, that he may have mercy on them, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.*

Thanks be to God. Now, Lord, accept the worship of our hearts and the service of our lives; we offer them in the name of Jesus our Lord. 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

**'From the squalor of a borrowed stable'**

Stuart Townend

**Old Testament reading** [Isaiah 55.1-9](#)

**New Testament reading** [Luke 13.1-9](#)

### 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*

*Do you think that because these Galileans suffered...they were worse sinners than all other Galileans?*

Do you think that because those Ukrainians are losing so much in war they were – worse sinners? In the wrong place at the wrong time? Innocents? Nazis?

Do you think that because those Russians can't get a Big Mac for love nor...; have lost their jobs, they were – supporters of Putin so deserved all they get?

Guilty by association because of where they live? Communists?

*Or those eighteen who were killed when the tower of Siloam fell on them—do you think that they were worse offenders than all the others living in Jerusalem?*

Or those 1000s lined up at the borders of Poland, Moldova...or those pregnant women bombed out of their hospital beds in Mariupol..or that 9 year old girl who lost an arm when her family were shot at when they were fleeing Kyiv?

Do you think...‘there but for the grace of God go I’?...do you think ‘God when will it end?..do you think ‘who do you think you are kidding, Mr Putin?’

Can't help thinking such things, can we? So much depends where we live, what we read, who we believe – what we *think*...

It's hard to discern what God might be saying in all this...but this is Lent, the season when Christians are bidden to *examine themselves*..

Jesus' words to his disciples in Luke Ch 13...the mood is darkening; early popularity is beginning to give way to hostility; Jesus' destiny looms ever larger; the signs of the times grow ever more sinister.

Jesus has just said (in Chapter 12) *'Do you think that I have come to bring peace to the earth? No, I tell you, but rather division!'*

And now, mingled in with the parables, the healings & teachings, are darker things – a barren tree makes for a parable, as we shall soon see,

But first, *this* – spoken to 'some present' who told him 'about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices.' Dark days...then...dark days now.

Then – Stubborn Galilean resistance to occupation...now – stubborn Ukrainian resistance to invasion....then...cruelty, harsh reprisals...now..did you hear about the town of Volnovakha near Mariupol – bombed till it 'no longer exists'

'Do you think?' – whatever you think – & we can imagine that 'some present' thought all the range of things that people then thought about suffering, or disasters –

Like today – people today think all the range of things that are thought about suffering and disasters and war

No matter, is what Jesus is really saying – especially if you think that it's all because of sin, - *this*: *'unless you repent, you will all of you come to the same end'*

That's the heart of Lent, really – 'unless you repent' – repent...that hard, harsh word that smacks of all the arrogance and narrow-mindedness that's so often associated with our religion –

'Repent, the end is nigh' on cartoon billboards...repent of your smoking, drinking, dancing, sex...*sin...repent...sackcloth and ashes...pilgrims crawling on their knees..repent...*

Not a bit of it – repentance, at heart, is *turning round....going in another direction*

Like a tank column on a Ukrainian road, stopping in its tracks, then turning round and going back to Russia, or Belarus, or wherever it came from.

Like an Oligarch, selling all he owns & giving the proceeds to the DEC

Like an army, turning its missiles and guns into tractor parts & refusing to learn war anymore

It's the profound, glorious vision of Isaiah - *Seek the LORD while he may be found, call upon him while he is near; let the wicked forsake their way, and the unrighteous their thoughts;*

*let them return to the LORD, that he may have mercy on them, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.*

*For my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways, says the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.*

That's repentance – it's turning our earth-bound thoughts of enemies and revenge, violence and reparations and *sin* to the very thoughts of God (whose thoughts are not our thoughts...)

Thoughts of peace...justice...an end to war..giving up...sacrifice...going the extra mile....dying to self.....following the Jesus who goes to a cross -

That's repentance. That's the very stuff of Lent – that's our calling, our destiny, the Kingdom to which we are going – the Kingdom of God..

And there's this barren, fruitless tree...and it stands there on the blasted earth – I imagine Ukrainian lands, once the breadbasket of the world, are littered with such trees –

Barren, useless, taking up good soil – for Jesus in the parable it's a symbol of the barren, godless, empty institution of Israel

Rachel didn't much like institutions, did she? She often called us to put relationships first, not to let the institutions of the church, or society around, dictate what we would do, or offer to people

I have a bit more time for institutions; though I know they can go wrong, can dry out, can become hollow, and barren and no longer fit for purpose –

Maybe they need to repent, turn around, as well. Imagine that – churches that put people first; nations that put peace, welcome and justice first; government departments that put service, simplicity and kindness

first....*repentant institutions*

Maybe that's God's word for our times – you nations, you organisations..you religions....repent...turn around.

Most of all – 'do not learn war anymore' – like that brave Russian TV producer - Marina Ovsyannikova, 'No War!' at the very heart of the Russian TV news institution – 'No War!'

Hundreds of Orthodox theologians from all over the world, and our own Keith Clements, have written to Patriarch Kirril of the Russian Orthodox Church *calling* for a return to the cross-shaped heart of the good news of Jesus Christ and his peaceable, endless Kingdom.

That's the parable, see; Jesus looks on failed, barren, fruitless Israel and likens it to a failed, barren, fruitless fig tree..

Only good for burning...only good for tearing down...

*Except..* Lent is supposed to remind us that between the world's institutions, its nations, its ways-of-doing-things..its thoughtless, selfish, money-driven, territory-grabbing, prejudice-spreading *ideas*

And us – and you and me...there is no distance at all...

We are like the barren fig tree; we are fruitless, empty, failing..we need to repent...always we need to repent....and turn to God...and choose the things that make for peace.....and –

*Seek the LORD while he may be found, call upon him while he is near; let the wicked forsake their way, and the unrighteous their thoughts; let them return to the LORD, that he may have mercy on them, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.*

That's the thing about the parable of the barren fig-tree, see – the vine-dresser is patient, not *endlessly* patient (God *will* have his Day, when the secrets of many hearts will be revealed),

But patient enough for me, for you, for the institutions and nations of the world – for the scared Russian soldier hunkering down in his bunker and firing another missile and the terrified Ukrainian family scrabbling in the rubble for something to eat –

In this Lent never has the world needed more than to hear of the patient, righteous, endlessly true, Word of God from the Cross – 'father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing'...

Never has the need been greater for us to *repent*

### **Prayer**

Lord, we come to you, and we turn round, from our own thoughts of selfishness, or revenge, or hatred of our enemies – to your thoughts; of peace, and justice...and forgiveness and love -against such things there is no law.....so we give of ourselves in these and all our gifts and as we turn, and as the world is challenged to turn from its violent, destructive ways. May your Kingdom come....

BPW204 'My song is love unknown'

## Prayers

We pray with aching, yearning hearts, not knowing quite how to pray; maybe not sure if prayer makes much difference – and yet – how can we *not* pray?

We pray for Vladimir Putin and his ministers, in their isolation, fear, distance from consequences, propagandising; determination to get *something* out of this war..

May truth prevail; may fear fall; may humility replace the will to power, may a way out be made; such things are impossible for us to imagine, but nothing is impossible for you, Lord,

Lord **Hear our prayer**

We pray for the people of Russia - in *their* increasing isolation; fear; confusion and abused loyalties; economic hardship and broken relationships

May truth prevail; may fear fall; may clarity come through brave acts and speech; may poets write and artists picture and musicians play with passion - such things are impossible for us to imagine, but nothing is impossible for you, O Lord,

Lord **Hear our prayer**

We pray for Russian soldiers & others fighting with them, in their isolation behind armour & guns; fear of the enemy & their own side; obedience to orders; wish to be home

May the truth of what they are doing prevail; may the fear of what might happen to them fall; may a sense of what is right spread; may they go home - such things are impossible for us to imagine, but nothing is impossible for you, Lord,

Lord **Hear our prayer**

We pray for people in Ukraine – Ukrainians injured; loved ones killed, homes and cities destroyed; the essentials of life out of reach; isolated from families; other nationals caught up in it all; people like us fleeing for their lives; making perilous journeys; fighting for freedom in any way they can

May the truth of what is happening prevail in the world; may fear of escalation not have the final say; may isolation be ended; wounds be healed; families be reunited; journeys be ended; welcome be extended; war be ended - such things are impossible for us to imagine, but nothing is impossible for you, O Lord,

Lord **Hear our prayer**

We would not forget to pray for elsewhere in the world – Yemen, Afghanistan, Syria; elsewhere – off the front pages now, and maybe the people there don't look so much like us but still in such places destruction rains down; injuries and deaths multiply; injustices pile up in refugee camps and at borders

May truth prevail in the whole world; may fear fall in the whole world; in the whole world may warfare cease; injuries and griefs be healed; new communities be built - such things are impossible for us to imagine, but nothing is impossible for you, O Lord,

Lord **Hear our prayer**

Finally we pray for ourselves; that we may turn to the truth, turn from fear; turn to reconciliation, turn from prejudice, hatred & warring words; that we may turn to you, O Lord - such things are impossible for us to imagine, but nothing is impossible for you, Lord,

Lord **Hear our prayer**

**BPW208 'Pull back the veil'**

## Blessing

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

Thanks everyone who has made today's service possible. Though news for Ukraine dominates, may our love of goodness, our support of one another; our hopes and dreams for a better world; our commitment to Christ, guide us each and every day...

Till we meet again..