**The Swiss Church in London**

**Church service, 20 January 2022**

**Welcome**

When I thought, ‘My foot is starting to slip’, your love, O Lord, supported me. I am constantly with you; you hold my right hand. I will acclaim you, O Lord, for I was at rock bottom, and you lifted me up. (Psalm 94:18; 73:23; 30:1)

Sooft ich sagte: ‘Mein Fuss wankt’, stützte mich deine Liebe, guter Gott. Ich bleibe immer bei dir. Du hältst meine rechte Hand. Du hast mich herausgezogen, als ich tief gefallen bin.

Quand je dis: ‘mon pied chancelle’, ta bienveillance, Eternel, me sert d’appui. Je suis toujours avec toi. Tu m’a saisi la main droite. Tu m’a relevé, et tu m’as géri.

Amen

With these words from the Book of Psalms I would like to welcome you to today’s service at the Swiss Church. It is wonderful to be once again reunited after a longer break.

Our Swiss Church is a peculiar little place. We come together here on a Sunday for many different reason: to find a moment of peace in this beautiful building, to pray and worship, to remember loved ones; we come here to see friends, and to cherish our Swiss traditions; we come here to sing, and to hear the most wonderful organ and the most talented organist in the whole of London, or perhaps just to get out of the house and do something on a Sunday in the absence of anything better to do... whatever it is that brought you here today, we are here for a reason. Anything we do in life happens for a reason, even if we can’t make sense of it.

Sometimes in life we hit rock bottom and we can’t imagine how to ever find our way out again.

Church is not necessarily a place to find answers. Church is a place where we can give space to our hurt, our questions, our doubts in the hope and knowledge that there is a God who will always be at our side, no matter how deep we fall.

We are in the presence of God, the Eternal, the maker, the source of love.

Let us pray.

**Prayer**

Loving God,

You have called us into fellowship of the church, to work alongside your people for the growth of your kingdom. You have called us into a family through which we can find support, encouragement, strength and inspiration.

Open our eyes today, in this very moment, to everything we can give and receive.

Teach us the secret of your love. Touch our hearts with your goodness so we may learn to let go of past hurts and embrace every present moment instead.

Shower us with your peace and grace and renew us, through your holy spirit.

Amen

**Reading, Luke 4:31-37**

**The Man with an Unclean Spirit**

Jesus went down to Capernaum, a city in Galilee, and was teaching people on the sabbath. They were astounded at his teaching, because he spoke with authority. In the synagogue there was a man who had the spirit of an unclean demon, and he cried out with a loud voice, “Let us alone! What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are, the Holy One of God.” But Jesus rebuked him, saying, “Be silent, and come out of him!” When the demon had thrown him down before them, he came out of him without having done him any harm. They were all amazed and kept saying to one another, “What kind of utterance is this? For with authority and power he commands the unclean spirits, and out they come!” And a report about him began to reach every place in the region.

**Sermon**

*Favorite Swiss lakes*

Some years ago, I regularly went to visit a Swiss woman in a care home in London. Her room was on the ground floor. The window ifaced a small backyard with a wall and only a little daylight came through. The woman was bed bound and she missed the outdoors. On the wall opposite her bed was a print of the Lake of Thun, doubtless one of the most beautiful lakes in Switzerland. We often talked about this image, travelling back in our minds to the shores of this Swiss lake.

For us Swiss, lakes are part of childhood. We grow up with lakes all around us. Many of our holidays and weekend memories include lakes: walking, swimming, hiking, barbequing a cervelat, picnicking, rowing and spending time with friends and first loves. Every Swiss person has a favorite lake, and I bet you do, too. If I had to pick one, the Lake of Lucerne, the Vierwaldstättersee, would be my favorite. I love the spectacular views of the mountains, the lake’s weird octopus shape, and the sense of history that surrounds it. Another of my favorites is the Oeschinensee in the Bernese Alps. I remember once after a seven-hour hike down from an Alpine hut on a hot summer day with friends, when we took off our heavy walking boots and clothes and dived into the cold waters of this small Alpine Lake. It was cold, but so refreshing.

What is your favorite lake?

*Lake of Galilee and the ministry of Jesus*

Today, as you may have guessed, I am going to take you to the shores of a lake. A very special lake! It’s not a Swiss lake though. Switzerland may have some of the highest lakes in the world, but today we are going to the lowest freshwater lake in the whole world, situated 215 meters below sea level. You can’t find that in Switzerland! I am taking you to Israel, to the Sea of Galilee, or Lake Tiberias, or See Genezareth in German. Imagine a lake about the size of Lake Morat, Lac Morat, or Murtensee in Switzerland, about 23km long. The Lake of Galilee is the very lake where much of the ministry of Jesus occurred. In those days, there was a continuous ribbon development of settlements and villages around the lake and plenty of trade and ferrying by boat. The Synoptic Gospels of Mark, Matthew and Luke describe how Jesus recruited four of his apostles from the shores of the lake: the fishermen Simon and his brother Andrew and the brothers John and James. One of Jesus' famous teaching episodes, the Sermon of the Mount, is supposed to have been given on a hill overlooking the Lake of Galilee. Many of his miracles are also said to have occurred there including his walking on water, calming the storm, the miraculous catch of fish and his feeding five thousand people.

In today’s reading according to the Gospel of Luke, Jesus goes to the small town of Capernaum. Capernaum, situated on the Northern shore of the lake, was established approximately 200 BC. It was one of the many fishing villages that sprung up along the lake. It was also a religious center with a synagogue, and with a cemetery. The people of Capernaum and the surrounding villages went to the synagogue on a Sabbath to hear the word of God. Remember that at the time there were no books or scriptures widely available, and certainly no phones, radios, television or internet. One couldn’t flick through a home Bible or google Bible words on the internet, let alone follow church services via live stream. The temple was the only place where the scripture was taught and therefore a hugely important place in people’s lives.

*Challenging ideas*

In Luke 4:31-37 we hear that Jesus went to preach in the synagogue. As he was teaching, a man with an unclean spirit, a demon, began shouting at Jesus: “Let us alone! What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are, the Holy One of God.” The man challenged the authority of Jesus and thought his ideas were dangerous for the established social order. Jesus asked the demon to leave the man’s body and healed him.

It sounds a bit old-fashioned to say that the man was possessed by an evil spirit. It seems he just didn’t like the radical ideas of Jesus Christ. Perhaps he was afraid of change, afraid of losing his privilege. We can only guess. He challenged a religious teacher in a place of worship. And what is wrong with that? Challenging ideas and having a debate is a good thing. Places of worship should be a place to have those debates. Jesus was a young man with an extraordinary fire for justice. He wanted to change the world, and he acted in the name of God. His teaching was a threat to established power structures. He stood up for the oppressed and marginalised.

We need the teaching of Jesus today more than ever. The pandemic has revealed existing and created new cracks in our society. So, although I do think that debate is important and that challenging ideas should be encouraged, I also understand the impatience of Jesus, and why he wanted to shut this man down. Because sometimes, there is just no time for big debates, and we need to act.

As I prepared for this sermon, the climate activists came to my mind. and especially the tens of thousands of young people around the globe who fear for their future on this beautiful life-giving planet. Immediate action is needed, we all know that, and yet the leaders of our countries do more talking than acting and ultimately, we are all to blame for our inaction. Sometimes impatience is the only answer, and non-violent radical interruption such as blocking airports, highways and crashing high-level meetings needed to attract attention and trigger change.

*Impatience*

People often say when asked about their weaknesses, that they are impatient. I don’t think impatience is necessarily a weakness. It is also a source of strength and a motor for change. Impatient people are passionate people. Impatient people care. Of course, impatience is not always the answer, and we need to judge carefully when to use it, but it deserves to be seen in a more favorable light, giving it the credit it deserves for all the change that it has brought about. Without impatience, there is no radical change. And let’s not forget, Jesus was famous for his impatience. He was so grumpy with the disciples when they woke him up in the middle of a storm on Lake Galilee, and he told them off for their lack of faith. He was impatient with people who didn’t believe in the kingdom of God. He was impatient with people who thought that a radical new world order was an impossible dream – a dream that we are still chasing today.

Let’s keep that in mind about Jesus, and next time, when your annoyed with your own impatience, think again, and ask yourself if your impatience is perhaps telling you something, even needed, right here and right now. Use your impatience as a motor for change, as Jesus did, on the shore of Lake Galilee. Amen

**Announcements**

The next service will take place on 6 February here at the church

Next dates for BoS: 1 Feb and 15 Feb

**Prayers of Intercession**

Healing God

Be present in the lives of those who mourn, who feel numb and crushed, and are filled with the pain of grief, whose strength has given up. Today we include in our prayers friends and family of Helene Szlachta and Verena Fernando, cherished members of our congregation who have recently buried. We also keep in our prayers our office assistant Ryan and his family who has recently lost his dad. God, you know all our sighing and longings: be near to us and teach us to fix our hope on you through Jesus Christ our Lord.

*Kyrie Eleison*

God of change,

Light in us your holy fire for your kingdom of change. Help us to play a part in its growth, to do what we can do to make it more real on earth. Teach us to recognise people’s gifts and to nurture them, to understand their problems, acknowledge their successes and applaud and affirm them. Teach us, through the faith we show in people, to help them attempt great things. May we learn to believe in each other and in ourselves, discover our abilities, and appreciate our full potential.

*Kyrie Eleison*

Creator God, who made our beautiful world, appointed us as its guardians and gifted us with everything we need, forgive us for the times we cause it harm; for the times our way of life affects our neighbours.

Inspire us to care for the environment; to help rebuild lives and communities; to share in the griefs and anxieties, joys and hopes of all your people, so that all your creation may flourish.

Amen

**Blessing**

“May your days be many, and your troubles be few. May all God’s blessings descend upon you. May peace be within you; may your heart be strong. May you find what you’re seeking wherever you roam.”

God bless you and keep you; God make her face to shine upon you and be gracious to you; God lift up her countenance upon you and give you peace.

Que le Seigneur te bénisse et te garde! Que le Seigneur fasse briller sur toi son visage, qu’il se penche vers toi! Que le Seigneur tourne vers toi son visage, qu’il t’apporte la paix!

Gott segne dich und behüte dich; Gott lasse das Angesicht leuchten über dir und sei dir gnädig; Gott hebe sein Angesicht über dich und gebe dir Frieden.

Amen

Gönd in Friede, und bringet de Fride i d’Wält. Go in peace, and bring peace to the world.