**The Swiss Church in London**

**Audio service, 18 July 2021**

**Welcome**

*“Nous sommes des ambassadeurs pour Christ, comme si Dieu adressait par nous son appel. Nous supplions au nom de Christ: «Soyez réconciliés avec Dieu!”*

*“We are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us; we entreat you on behalf of Christ: be reconciled to God. (2 Corinthians 5:20)”*

*„Wir sind Botschafter für Christus, und zwar so, dass Gott selbst durch uns ermahnt; so bitten wir nun stellvertretend für Christus: Lasst euch versöhnen mit Gott!“*

Good morning and welcome to today’s audio service from the Swiss Church in London!

You are an ambassador for Christ! God is making her appeal through you. How does this make you feel?

On one hand, it is an incredibly empowering message. We are called to act in this world on behalf of Christ. We are given the authority to build the kingdom of God, to act in God’s name. That’s a lot of responsibility, and it can also easily feel like a burden. What does in even mean, to be an ambassador for Christ? Where do I even begin, and what’s the right thing to do?

Each one of us is a different kind of ambassador. We bring different talents, personalities and abilities to the table. In order to fulfil our calling as ambassadors of Christ it is therefore vital to take some time to think about ourselves, our ambassador style. What is it that I can contribute? What are my strengths, my best personality features, what do I feel passionate about, what can I pass on to other people?

Let this coming half hour be an opportunity to do exactly that: connect with ourselves and the very best we have to offer.

Let us pray.

**Prayer**

Almighty God,

We are united today in prayer and thoughts to find out what we can do to further your kingdom. We are united in the hope that this world can be a better place, and that your love will always have the last word. That’s the hope we hang on to, the belief that keeps our faith alive.

However small and insignificant we may consider ourselves compared to others, teach us that with your help we can do surprising things, greater than we would believe possible. Teach us to recognise the abilities that we are given and use them to the full. May we believe in ourselves, see our worth, and love ourselves just as much as our neighbour, so we can reach out to others from a place of peace and calm.

Healing God, we pray,

be our strength, be our rock in the storm, nourish and grow our faith today.

Amen

**Reading Mark 6:7-13**

He called the twelve and began to send them out two by two, and gave them authority over the unclean spirits. He ordered them to take nothing for their journey except a staff; no bread, no bag, no money in their belts; but to wear sandals and not to put on two tunics. He said to them, “Wherever you enter a house, stay there until you leave the place. If any place will not welcome you and they refuse to hear you, as you leave, shake off the dust that is on your feet as a testimony against them.” So they went out and proclaimed that all should repent. They cast out many demons, and anointed with oil many who were sick and cured them.

**Sermon**

*Jesus sends us with less*

“Phone, keys, wallet, mask” – many of us have a mantra we recite as we leave home, to ensure we are ready for the day. Jesus sends us out with less, no bread, no bag, no money – nothing but a pair of sandals, a tunic and a staff. He invites us to trust, to be ready to engage with and to respond to the world around us.

Imagine that you have been invited to join the twelve apostles. You are excited about being sent out to speak of the Kingdom of God. Your goal is to go from house to house bringing the Good News, creating a different kind of society based on our respect and love for those we meet each day. Then as now, people judged the message of Christ by the life of the messengers more than by the words they spoke.

Imagine you are going from house to house, knocking on doors. You depend on the goodwill of those you visit. Some doors will open for you, strangers inviting you in, feeding you and letting you stay for a while. They will listen to you and take interest in what you have to say, perhaps even share your enthusiasm for the kingdom of God and share your sense of newfound hope and purpose. Others will turn you away, even curse and insult you.

What do you do?

*Go and get your blessing*

Two weeks ago, we spoke about a rather peculiar story in the Book of Genesis, the story of Jacob wrestling with a mysterious person in the middle of the night by the River Jabbok. For Jacob it was clear that this person was God, although the Bible doesn’t say that. Jacob says to his opponent: “I won’t let you go until you bless me!” Jacob comes across as a rather stubborn and demanding person who knows what he wants and won’t let go until he gets it. His attitude may be irritating as it doesn’t quite fit in with the values that we commonly associate with Christian discipleship and have been preached by the Church for centuries: values such as humility, restraint and submission. Values that perhaps are not always very helpful.

We came to the conclusion that perhaps we should be more like Jacob, go out and get our blessings, tell people and tell God what we need and what we expect from life – not in an arrogant or disrespectful way, but because we are worth it. We deserve to be listened to. We deserve God’s blessing, and yet so many people think that what they have is all they deserve.

*Keep wrestling or walk away?*

Let’s turn our attention back to the apostles who are going from house to house with nothing but sandals, a tunic and a staff, preaching the Gospel of Christ, whilst depending on people’s goodwill to be fed. Some doors will be opened, some will be shut. Imagine you are an apostle and people turn you away, shut close the door in your face.

What do you do?

Are you like Jacob, wrestling until daybreak to get what you want, even risking an injury? Or would you follow the advice of Jesus, walking away and shaking off the dust as you leave?

It’s an interesting question. Both reactions take courage, to hold on and wrestle, and to walk away and let go. Most importantly, it takes wisdom to distinguish between the two and to decide what’s the appropriate thing to do in any given situation. For example, you wouldn’t expect a sportsperson to walk away just minutes before the end of a competition and shake off the dust, just because their opponents try their very hardest to beat them! On the other hand, when a new leader is elected in a democratic vote, you wouldn’t expect their opponents to keep fighting for their victory.

So, do we keep wrestling or do we walk away? It’s a decision we have to make again and again in life. The more we become involved with community building, the more people we come across. Preaching the Gospel and building strong communities is first and foremost about forming human relationships. Every relationship is different. Some have the power to lift us up and make us strong; others are toxic, hold us back or even oppress us.

*Knock on every door*

Christ’s disciples are community builders. As community builders we have to manage our resources wisely. Jesus encourages us to focus on the healthy and supportive relationships and waste less energy on relationships that tear us down. Knock on every door, Jesus says, and try to establish as many relationships as possible; but know when it is time to walk away and shake off the dust.

Sometimes people have pre-constructed opinions and are unable to look beyond that narrative, and they are unable to allow people to own their own narrative and to listen. Sometimes we are those people. We all sometimes construct narratives on behalf of others, perhaps without even realising, rather than listening to their story and their thoughts. Either way, the question is whether we have the ability in us to listen when someone feels overheard rather than becoming defensive and making it about ourselves. That’s a very high art, and one we have to keep learning throughout life.

And sometimes, there is just no other option than to walk away, shake off the dust and knock on the next door, curious who we are going to meet.

Amen

**Prayers of Intercession**

Gracious God,

we pray, bless us in the hospitality we give to friends and strangers, and in the hospitality that we receive.

Help us to form healthy relationships,

able to listen to each other with an open and sincere mind,

and generously making time and space to get to know each other better.

May we strengthen and encourage each other to be the best version of ourselves

and further your kingdom with our abilities.

Give us the wisdom to walk away from discouraging and toxic relationships,

and to shake off the dust and carry on in your name.

*Kyrie Eleison*

God of love,

you call everyone to you and to give freely of their time and gifts.

Bless all who respond to your generous love through voluntary service in the Church and wider community.

Especially, bless all who give their time and gifts to the Swiss Church, no matter what their faith background, or none: the members of the Consistoire and the Art Committee, our church groups, those who contribute to the Sunday service, those serving the homeless community in our neighbourhood, musicians and artists.

May our commitment make the world an ever more welcoming, just and peaceful place.

*Kyrie Eleison*

Healing God,

we pray for the broken-hearted, the lonely, the imprisoned and the traumatised.

We pray for all who are held captive against their will, or for crimes they haven’t committed. We pray for all who are denied access to a fair trial,

powerless in the eye of arbitrary judiciary and governments.

We pray for all facing racist and antisemitic abuse on a daily basis, deliberate as well unconscious, and we pray, make us ever more aware of our own prejudice and our own unconscious actions, and give us the strength to seek dialogue and face our own failures.

Lord, we pray bring change, and mend what has been broken. Amen

**Blessing**

May the living God be by your side, no matter how long the path. May the Lord look upon you gently, soften your heart and make you whole.

The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you; the Lord lift up his 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 sein Angesicht leuchten über dir und sei dir gnädig; Gott hebe sein Angesicht über dich und gebe dir Frieden.

Amen