**Audio service The Swiss Church in London**

**21 March 2020**

**“The modern-day version of burnt offerings” (Psalm 43)**

**Welcome (Rev Carla Maurer)**

“Although Jesus was a Son, he learned obedience through what he suffered; and having been made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him.” (Hebrews 7:8-9)

“Obwohl Jesus Sohn war, lernte er an dem, was er litt, den Gehorsam. Dadurch wurde er zur Vollendung gebracht und ist zum Urheber ewigen Heils geworden für alle, die ihm gehorsam sind.”

“Ainsi, bien qu’étant Fils, il a appris l'obéissance par ce qu’il a souffert. Et parfaitement qualifié, il est devenu pour tous ceux qui lui obéissent l'auteur d'un salut éternel.”

Together with Marianne, Peter, Colin and Niccolo who have contributed to this service today, I would like to welcome you to the audio service from the Swiss Church in London.

Jesus, eternal saviour for all who obey him – this is the word from the New Testament today. There is something old-fashioned and oppressive about the idea of obedience and submission. Many values in the Bible have been interpreted in an oppressive way and have been used by some people to gain power over others. The opposite is true. The Bible is about liberation from oppressive circumstances. So sometimes, we have to reclaim certain concepts from the Bible that have been misinterpreted and discover them anew in the light of liberation.

Today we are going to think about what it means to submit ourselves to God through the words of Psalm 43, and we are going to discover why it is liberating to give ourselves to God.

Niccolo will lead us in prayer.

**Opening Prayer (Niccolo Aliano)**

Most merciful God,

By the passion of your Son you delivered us from the power of darkness: Increase our love and hope, so that following his example we may carry our cross and walk up to Calvary; and strengthen our faith in him, so that with him we will conquer death and rejoice in the final victory. All this we ask in his name.

Amen.

**Reading Isaiah 43:15-21, Part 1**

I am the Lord, your Holy One,

 the Creator of Israel, your King.

Thus says the Lord,

 who makes a way in the sea,

 a path in the mighty waters,

who brings out chariot and horse,

 army and warrior;

they lie down, they cannot rise,

 they are extinguished, quenched like a wick:

Do not remember the former things,

 or consider the things of old.

I am about to do a new thing;

 now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?

I will make a way in the wilderness

 and rivers in the desert.

The wild animals will honor me,

 the jackals and the ostriches;

for I give water in the wilderness,

 rivers in the desert,

to give drink to my chosen people,

the people whom I formed for myself

so that they might declare my praise.

**Sermon, Part 1 (Rev Carla Maurer)**

There is something very interesting about the chapter titles in modern day Bible translations. In the original Bible, the Hebrew Bible, there are no titles. Titles were added later to make the Bible more user friendly. Today’s reading is taken from the New Revised Standard Version, and each Psalm is given a title which summarises and interprets its content. Psalm 43 is called ‘Restoration and Protection Promised’.

We all yearn for restoration and protection, for ourselves, our loved ones, our country and the whole world. We often don’t know how essential it is to feel safe until it is taken away from us. We have all felt threatened at some point in our lives, and for some people this feeling is a constant companion. For example, in recent weeks hundreds and thousands of women spoke out about the constant threat they feel when walking home alone.

What makes you feel unsafe?

When did you feel threatened in your life?

Psalm 43 is written from God’s perspective. “I am the Holy One, Creator of Israel, your King”, the Psalm begins. We have to be aware that whenever we read a text written from God’s perspective that the Bible is ultimately written by humans and we see their experience with God reflected, rather than ultimate truth. God was, is and always will be mystery. We will always be short of grasping the full extent of God’s holy nature, and it is important that we understand our limitations. No human is keeper of the truth, only God is.

This said, in this first part of the reading, which Colin has brought to us beautifully, God talks in a wonderfully poetic fashion about his reassuring presence in our lives. *“God makes a way in the sea, a path in the mighty waters”*, a reference of the Israelites crossing the Red Sea as they escape from Egypt. *“Do not consider the things of old. I am bout to do a new thing.” – “I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert.” – “I will give drink to my chosen people, the people whom I formed for myself.”* A path through the waters, the creation of new things, rivers of water in the desert, a refreshing drink of water… Even in the most hostile environments, God protects and provides for us, and this is the faith that we can hold on to.

Yet the relationship between God and us has its ups and downs, like every relationship, and we are going to hear in the second part of the reading how God’s beautiful promise is repeatedly challenged.

**Reading Isaiah 43:22-26, Part 2**

Yet you did not call upon me, O Jacob;

 but you have been weary of me, O Israel!

You have not brought me your sheep for burnt offerings,

 or honored me with your sacrifices.

I have not burdened you with offerings,

 or wearied you with frankincense.

You have not bought me sweet cane with money,

 or satisfied me with the fat of your sacrifices.

But you have burdened me with your sins;

 you have wearied me with your iniquities.

I, I am He

 who blots out your transgressions for my own sake,

 and I will not remember your sins.

Accuse me, let us go to trial;

 set forth your case, so that you may be proved right.

**Sermon, Part 2 (Rev Carla Maurer)**

God feels abandoned. She who protects and provides for us feels let down. “I am here!”, God says, “but you are tired of me. When have you last come to me? All I get from you are your sins.”

At the time when this Psalm was written, it was custom to offer God burnt offerings, to sacrifice a sheep or a goat, and to add good smelling scents to the fire, such as frankincense. Apparently, it was also custom to buy God sweets with money!

Nowadays the custom of burnt offerings has died out, at least in our part of the world. Even if we wanted to offer God a goat or a sheep like in good old times, there would be quite some obstacles to overcome first. Hardly anyone knows how to hunt and prepare a small animal, let alone have the space and facilities to burn it in their garden. And I’m not sure if the council and the neighbours would be particularly happy about our oversized barbeque.

So what can we offer God today instead of burnt offerings and sweet cane?

The purpose of the offering as described in the Psalm is to dedicate some of our time fully to God. It is about giving ourselves to God, to bow down, to let the mystery of life transcend our earthly reality and exercise humility. We are but guests on this earth, coming from God and returning to that same place. God is in us, around us, protects and provides for us. It needs time and dedication to connect with this divine reality.

What is your modern-day version of a burnt offering?

How do you make time to connect with God?

There are many temptations, all around us, that make us forget that we are God’s children, and that we have God’s light in us. Greed, violence, mistrust and jealousy are only some of the signs that we have forgotten who we are and where we come from. It is this disconnect from the essence of life that the Bible calls sin.

“You have burdened me with your sins; you have wearied me with your iniquities”, God says. Yet God offers a way out. “Let us go on trial, let us talk about our sins and get it right”, God says.

At Easter, Christians around the world will be remembering the death of Jesus on the Cross. It is the ultimate sacrifice, not our sacrifice, but God’s sacrifice for us humans. We may have forgotten to give ourselves to God, but God has not forgotten us. In an ultimate sacrifice God gives up their only son to take upon himself all our sins for a brand-new start.

We can put this right and become more peaceful, caring and humble beings, giving ourselves up and trust in God’s protection and provision.

Amen

**Announcements**

We will continue to produce audio services in the coming weeks. The earliest possible date for a return to in-person services at the Swiss Church in Endell Street will be Whit Sunday, the 23rd of May. More information will be shared nearer the time.

If you would like to make a donation for the Swiss Church, you will find the payment details on the webpage. Thank you for everything you can give!

**Prayers of Intercession (Marianne Fisher-Hertig)**

Our Heavenly Father

Your Kingdom come on earth as it is in heaven.

We invite you to come with your Holy Spirit. Come Holy Spirit, come.

Fill our hearts and our homes; wherever we are and whenever we listen to this service.

We praise you for your steadfastness Lord. We acknowledge you are the Alpha and Omega and the everlasting one.

Father help us to lay down at the bottom of your cross whatever has happened so far today; joy as well as our worries and burden so we are free to receive from you, hear from you and draw near you. We thank you for the present Lent season. A conscious time to connect with you and draw nearer. We ask for something new every day; a revelation about you, you showing us something about nature, an unexpected call or message, or you prompting us to do something. We pray we are aware of all these godly things and we give you glory for these moments and times.

Lord, we pray for all the world leaders. Shower them with your wisdom. May they be able to hear it. Father, our hearts are heavy hearing about continuous war torn areas. Make Politicians be willing to communicate with each other. We ask for your guidance on everyone making decisions about Covid, how to come out of lockdown and the vaccination program. We ask for a fair share of vaccines across all nations.

Nearer home we lift up people who are not well; be that physical, emotional or spiritual. Lay your healing hands on them. Lift anxiety off people. Comfort people who mourn, we pray. We pray you protect each one of us, bless us with your infinite peace, pour out your grace on us and fill us with your love and cuddles.

Amen