**The Swiss Church in London**

**Audio Service 4 October 2020**

**Welcome**

*For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope. (Jeremiah 29:11)*

*En effet, moi, je connais les projets que je forme pour vous, déclare l'Eternel, projets de paix et non de malheur, afin de vous donner un avenir et de l'espérance.*

*Denn ich weiß, was für Gedanken ich über euch habe, spricht Gott, Gedanken des Friedens und nicht des Unheils, um euch eine Zukunft und eine Hoffnung zu geben.*

*In the name of God, parent, son and holy spirit. Amen*

Welcome everyone, and a special welcome to those who were unable to join us at the Swiss Church two weeks ago. It was a wonderful occasion to meet again at church, and those who attended know that I was even a bit tearful. It felt quite emotional to be reunited with the congregation. But it was hard not to sing! Today, Peter Yardley-Jones will bring again the hymns into your living rooms, and be reassured that you are allowed to sing as loud as you can.

The pandemic is still with us. We are facing winter, which means new social restrictions to prevent the spreading of the virus. Although most of us are probably calmer about it than back in March, this second wave of restrictions – whatever we may think about them - will have a huge impact on people’s mental health and livelihood. The negative consequences of the economic and social lockdowns on people’s lives are already apparent, especially for the most vulnerable in our society, but I think we will only see the true impact in the months and years to come, and it won’t be pretty. My sister, who works as a trauma therapist in Switzerland, has told me that the number of clients seeking help has gone through the roof. It does worry me, and I wonder how long it will take for society to recover.

One big news topic in recent weeks was the behaviour of young people and their return to university. Many universities had to impose self-isolation on their students who find themselves in a brand-new life situation far away from family and friends. I remember from my own time at university how important the social contact with other students was, and how vital the possibility to return to my parental home whenever things felt overwhelming. To be deprived from this social safety net must be very difficult at this stage of life. Young people are vulnerable. They need our support and our understanding, not threats and hostile reactions as often voiced in recent weeks. In today’s service I will explore what role young people play in the Bible.

Students Niccolo Aliano and Lilian Jost will lead us in prayer.

**Prayer (Niccolo Aliano)**

God of grace, You are our parent.

Teach us to discern our gifts, so that young we may rejoice in our energy and old we may share our wisdom; let your loving Spirit be our guide so that in all we do in our lives we may follow the example of your Son, our Saviour Jesus Christ.

Amen

I invite you to join in with the first hymn: Praise and thanksgiving, a harvest song to the familiar tune of Morning has Broken. You will find the hymn sheet on the Swiss Church webpage.

**Hymn 1: Praise and Thanksgiving**

**Reading: Ecclesiastes 11:7-10**

“Light is sweet, and it is pleasant for the eyes to see the sun.

Even those who live many years should rejoice in them all; yet let them remember that the days of darkness will be many. All that comes is vanity.

Rejoice, young man and women, while you are young, and let your heart cheer you in the days of your youth. Follow the inclination of your heart and the desire of your eyes, but know that for all these things God will bring you into judgment.

Banish anxiety from your mind, and put away pain from your body; for youth and the dawn of life are vanity.”

**Hymn 2: O Ma Joie et Mon Esperance**

**Reading: 1 Timothy 4:11-16**

“These are the things you must insist on and teach. Let no one despise your youth, but set the believers an example in speech and conduct, in love, in faith, in purity. Until I arrive, give attention to the public reading of scripture, to exhorting, to teaching. Do not neglect the gift that is in you, which was given to you through prophecy with the laying on of hands by the council of elders. Put these things into practice, devote yourself to them, so that all may see your progress. Pay close attention to yourself and to your teaching; continue in these things, for in doing this you will save both yourself and your hearers.”

**Sermon**

I recently turned 40. Forty is a funny age, it’s not old, but also not young anymore. I remember when I was in my early twenties, 40 sounded if not old then definitely very grown up. In Biblical times that would have been a very different matter. At the age of 40 I would have been a very old person.

‘Young’ and ‘old’ are categories that are defined by the historic and geographic context we live in. How we perceive ourselves is often a very different matter. Does anyone ever really feel old? I believe that deep inside we always perceive ourselves as young, no matter what it says on the age tag. We carry the imprint of our childhood and youth within us. Our hopes and dreams stay the same.

In today’s Western societies the average life expectancy for men is 79 and for women 84. In Biblical times life expectancy was less than half that. Modern medicine, healthier lifestyles and a long period of peace with our neighbours have increased our life span and therefore the length of what we consider young age. And yet there is no denial that at some point our body will become weaker, and our physical and mental abilities set boundaries that are hard to accept.

In Ecclesiastes, the preacher refers specifically to the light, and the decline of eyesight that often comes with old age. The preacher may have his own experiences with the loss of eyesight. He urges young people to enjoy the light and the sight of the sun, as the day of darkness will be many. And yet, the preacher shows no signs of bitterness or envy. His words are words of encouragement for the younger generation. He says: rejoice, young women and men, be cheerful in the days of your youth! Embrace your youthfulness, your energy and your abilities as long as they last! It is a life affirming and positive message without judgment. “Follow the inclination of your heart and the desire of your eyes”, the preacher says.

The tone on the radio and in the newspapers was far from that in recent weeks. Up and down the country young people were criticised for breaking the lockdown rules and being careless, whereas in truth they have probably taken the biggest share of the load. In order to prosper in life and find their foot they should now be experimenting, acquiring new skills, discovering the world, making friends, dating and socialising. But lockdown has put a temporary halt to all this, and the ongoing social and economic restrictions will see many young people’s hopes crushed. The Prince of Wales has recently spoken out and said that this was a particularly difficult time for young people. He thinks that a million youngsters in the UK will need urgent help to protect their futures and warns of a ‘lost generation’. The under 25s have been hit hardest by unemployment in lockdown. Students have expressed confusion and worry about the situation at universities, and 400’000 pupils are still not back at school. This crisis deprives young people from vital opportunities and experiences, and how anyone could put the blame on them I find incomprehensible. People of all ages break the lockdown rules, and I myself had one or two moments when I cheated.

The Bible is full of stories of young people:

Jesus and his disciples were young men and women who left their families behind to follow the vision of God’s Kingdom on earth.

Young David confronted the much older and stronger Goliath with a simple slingshot, and thanks to the young man’s wit God’s people were saved.

Esther was hardly a teenager when she became Queen and with her strategic political thinking convinced the King not to listen to the evil ideas of his highest officer, thus saving her own people.

As in any time and age, these young biblical characters are the driving force behind change. They are less settled in their ways and therefore more courageous. With their determination and passion for change and justice they steer their people’s fate and please God with their actions, often by putting themselves or their futures at risk. Jesus and his disciples walked away from the comfort of their family homes to face an unknown future, in their luggage nothing but the unshakable hope of a better world. We admire in Jesus what we would often label naïve in today’s youth.

Society depends on both the wisdom of the old and the energy of the young generation. In order to thrive and create a peaceful world we need to support and respect one another. “Let no one despise your youth”, the author of Timothy’s letters says. “Do not neglect the gift that is in you. Put these things into practice, devote yourself to them. Everyone should see your progress. In doing this you will save both yourself and your hearers.”

It is clear that the author of this letter holds his young audience in very high regard. They are the ones who will advance the cause of Christ with their determination and youthful energy. Youthful energy needs space and freedom to excel. Whatever we think of the current pandemic measures, we need to be aware that the ongoing call for self-isolation and restrictions puts the young generations at risk, their futures and their mental health. If we can’t even keep the mid-generations in employment, how will young people make their ends meet? Scapegoating young people is the worst we can do. Many people would do good to listen to the message of the older preacher in Ecclesiastes who has nothing but words of encouragement for the younger generation.

“Let no one despise your youth”, the Bible says. God will be the judge.

Amen

**Announcements**

I would like to thank to everyone listening to this service for your very generous donations which have helped the church greatly to keep afloat. We are thankful for any further donation you can make. You will find the payment options for your donations on the webpage.

We have news from the Consistoire. It is with great regret that we have to say goodbye to trustee and member of the congregation Colin McIntyre. Colin will shortly move to Liverpool and he therefore decided to step down as a trustee. Colin has not only filled various important positions, such as safeguarding and marriage registrations, but he has also been a reassuring, reliable and knowledgeable presence in many areas of our church. Colin’s absence will be felt, but at the same time I am filled with confidence that we will be able to fill this gap and keep Colin’s spirit alive. Colin will occasionally be around to say hello, and he will continue to help with certain tasks from afar, which we are very grateful for.

The next service will take place at the Swiss Church in Endell Street on the 18th of October, and we are looking forward to baptise Lucas and welcome him into the worldwide church community. Please keep in mind that the over 70ies or those with health conditions are entitled to a £20 refund for their taxi fare to make your travel as safe as possible.

Lili will now lead us in prayer.

**Prayers of Intercession, with Kyrie**

God, you have all the time in the world. Time probably doesn't matter to you all that much. But for us, it's everything. And at the moment, many of us feel like we're wasting our precious time. We still have nowhere to be, nothing to do, no way to reach our goals because time is standing still but passing by very quickly at the same... time.

Most students are under a lot of pressure. We still need to perform and deliver the same results and grades, but our resources have changed drastically. And time feels different this year. We are overwhelmed!

But I know that you DO care, and that we ARE important to you, so I ask you: help us use the little time we have on this planet wisely, and, perhaps, give us just a little bit more of it, this time around.

*Kyrie Eleison*

God, are you ever lonely? If I had to guess I'd probably say no. Us humans on the other hand have known loneliness forever. And currently, many young people, students, are experiencing loneliness to a new degree for the first time. The places we used to go to to experience human connection have been gone for months - class rooms, libraries, choirs, yoga studios, clubs. At this point many of us are properly yearning for friendship and love and even university.

God, don't forget us. Don't forget the first year student who moved to a new town, practically unable to connect to new peers. Don't forget those of us stuck in toxic flat shares with people we don't really like. Don't forget those of us who rely on weak WiFi to attend online classes. God, don't forget us.

Amen

**Hymn: Wir pfluegen und wir streuen**

**Communion**

**Lord’s Prayer**

**Blessing**

The grace of Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Ghost, be with us all evermore.

Amen