

The Swiss Church in London Church service 7 June 2020

Welcome

“God saw everything that she had made, and indeed, it was very good.”

“Dieu regarda tout ce qu'il avait fait, et constata que c'était très bon.”

“Und Gott sah alles, was sie gemacht hatte; und siehe, es war sehr gut.“

Welcome to the audio service from the Swiss Church in London on the 7th of June. In the last service I announced that Gerry Stanton from the Union Church in Crouch End will join us, but unfortunately Gerry has been taken ill and he will join us sometime in the coming weeks instead. We wish Gerry all the best.

Today's service is dedicated to all those who are experiencing this time of lockdown and social distancing as a positive time. It's not something we often talk about, and for those who feel inspired and content it can be difficult to say it out loud. After all, aren't we meant to suffer?

Today I will be joined for the sermon by Symeon Kyriakopoulos, a dancer and Pilates instructor originally from Greece who has been a friend and member of the Swiss Church for many years now, and we will talk about the blessing this strange time can be, and why it is important to talk about it, especially because many people are suffering.

But first, I would like to introduce to you Barbara Wachter, the new President of the Steering Committee put in place by the Consistoire in order to lead our church through the current health crisis.

Greetings by Barbara Wachter, President of the Consistoire's Steering Committee

Hi, this is Barbara Wachter speaking. It is a great pleasure to send greetings on this Sunday and to introduce myself to all of you. I have grown up in Langenthal, Switzerland and then studied in Zurich and moved to India in 2016 and to London in 2017 where I did my Master degree. Since then I have been living in the centre of London with my partner William not too far away from Covent Garden and Endell Street. Late last year after having been introduced

to the Swiss Church by my aunt Maja who spent her sabbatical here as some of you may recall I joined the Consistoire eager to connect with fellow Swiss in London and support the amazing community programmes in my own neighbourhood here. Within the Consistoire I have taken up the role of networking officer, connecting and managing relationships with partners and friends of the church. As you may have heard the Consistoire have recently established a Steering Committee to provide special guidance and leadership through the current crisis. It is a great pleasure to serve on this committee as President alongside Marco Mambelli, Colin McIntyre, Carla Maurer and Hassan Mohanna. I would like to wish you and your loved ones a peaceful and mindful Sunday and even though so many of us are confined at home with some of the difficulties that this can bring a day of rest, reflection and recuperation. Thanks to Carla for bringing us together in this way, even though we are for now apart. I look forward to meeting all of you in the time ahead.

Prayer

God of justice

In the light of current events following the killing of George Floyd
We ask, help us to recognize our own privilege
in a world that is infiltrated by racism and injustice.

We ask you, help us to ask ourselves in all honesty
what we contribute to fuel racism in our society
through the words we chose, the judgements we make, the actions we fail to
take.

In a world where the colour of one's skin, one's gender, sexual orientation or
financial wealth mean disadvantage for some and privilege for others, help us
to hear your voice.

But also, teach us not to feel guilty because of our privilege,
but instead to use our place in this society quietly and consistently
to enable real change and to open up opportunities for those around us
who have to fight harder than anyone else to make their voices heard.

God of outrage,
light in us your holy anger.
Lift us out of the world of injustice and into your Kingdom,

so we can see and hear and pray and act
to install justice in our minds, on our doorsteps and worldwide.

We ask this in Jesus' name.

Amen

Ezekiel 17:22-24

Thus says God:

I myself will take a sprig
from the lofty top of a cedar;
I will set it out.
I will break off a tender one
from the topmost of its young twigs;
I myself will plant it
on a high and lofty mountain.
On the mountain height of Israel
I will plant it,
in order that it may produce boughs and bear fruit,
and become a noble cedar.
Under it every kind of bird will live;
in the shade of its branches will nest
winged creatures of every kind.
All the trees of the field shall know
that I am God.
I bring low the high tree,
I make high the low tree;
I dry up the green tree
and make the dry tree flourish.
I have spoken;
I will accomplish it.

Sermon Rev Carla Maurer

Dear parishoners, Dear listeners

In these past weeks we have been talking a lot about the negative
consequences of the lockdown, and how it impacts on people's mental health

and on the economic situation overall. Livelihoods are at risk, and many people are exhausted from the additional daily responsibilities imposed on them due to school closures or other circumstances. It is a physical and mental strain for many, and it won't end with the lockdown, quite the opposite. When things will open up again, that's when the struggles will become visible and the pain shared.

But for some, the lockdown has brought the much-needed rest that we never dared to take. No more squeezing into an overfilled tube train, no more rushing from appointment to appointment or from meeting to meeting, no more stressing to the shop before it closes, no more air travel, loud restaurants, crowded shops. The world was suddenly much quieter. The day structure simple. Our friends available on the phone. There was no fear of missing out, because there was little to miss out on. We were forced to stop and stay at home.

For some this is a time of healing and recovery, a time full of surprises, a time to breathe, a time to focus on the small joys of life, on our own emotions and the relationships within our household. I have been talking to quite a few people and of all ages and background and family situations for whom the lockdown is weirdly liberating and enjoyable. One thing was mentioned in each one of those conversations, and that's that people feel reluctant to tell others that they are doing well.

It shouldn't be like that.

I believe it is important that those who are feeling well within themselves and who are developing new strength make themselves heard. I believe it is important that those who can afford to look after themselves continue to do so, because once we come out of the lockdown the wounds will become more visible. Many people will need a shoulder to lean on, will need an open ear, a neighbour or friends who can provide spiritual and mental support. The worst thing we can do is to artificially exhaust ourselves even if there is no need to do so, or to feel guilty. We need people who can be that shoulder, who can be that friend and anchor in the future. That future starts now.

We all react differently in a crisis, and no one is affected in exactly the same way. Depending on our resources and circumstances it can be a fight for survival or a time of enrichment.

I have chosen two images from the Bible for today's service: Jesus healing people on the mountain; and the image of a young twig from the top of a cedar that will grow into a tree to bear fruit and become a shelter for all kinds of birds and creatures.

Teresa of Avila, a Spanish nun who lived in the 16th Century, said in a famous prayer that Jesus depends on us to be the eyes of compassion for the world, to be the feet who walk to do good, to be the hands to bless the world. Jesus needs people who can be a source of life for those who feel down.

We need young twigs broken off from the big tree, that feel rooted and will grow and become a shelter for many, a shady place to rest and provide nourishment.

If you can, look after yourselves, enjoy this time to breathe, use it to gain inner strength and to heal and develop spiritually. This might feel contracyclical and somehow egotistic. But it is not. It is the best thing you can do for all those who are struggling. Become that tree of shelter. Become a source of healing. If you feel good, if you feel rooted, don't be shy to let people know. Let them know that they are safe and that they have found in you someone to lean on.

Amen

Matthew 15:29-31

After Jesus had left that place, he passed along the Sea of Galilee, and he went up the mountain, where he sat down. Great crowds came to him, bringing with them the lame, the maimed, the blind, the mute, and many others. They put them at his feet, and he cured them, so that the crowd was amazed when they saw the mute speaking, the maimed whole, the lame walking, and the blind seeing. And they praised the God of Israel.

Thoughts by Symeon Kyriakopoulos

The lockdown in London will be a period I will never forget and I will narrate it to everyone until I grow old. It almost felt like a gift from God, a bliss. It helped me to recenter and remind myself of the more humble nature of being human.

I do like living in a city and London is probably one of the busiest. In such a fast paced city I do feel that I am progressing or evolving but at the same time I feel

I have been losing the simple things. The things that are important have become meaningless chores. Sometimes I have no time to cook, no time to do my laundry, no time to clean my flat. And if I do, I may be so tired that I have no energy. I may have no time to write to my diary. I have to plan friends visits and even phone calls way in advance. They say that if so, much of your time is given away that you can't do the simple things such as cleaning, then you are not free.

All of that paused for a bit. Suddenly I had the time and the energy to do all of that. Taking care of myself become more holistic. The difference is not that I simply had time to clean my flat or cook. What really made the difference was that I could clean my flat with joy. I actually drew pleasure from all the mundane chores. My life gained so much more meaning from every respect.

I am living on my own but the lockdown Didn't make me feel lonely at all. Quite the opposite I felt very connected with everyone. There was actually more time to speak to friends and to family. But there is also something invisible which I can't explain very well. The fact that we all had to stay home it made me feel safe because in the process of isolation we were all united.

Prayers of Intercession (Marianne Fisher-Hertig)

Lord, Father, to be honest, we did not think we would still be worshipping from our homes and we are fed up. But we know it's all in your hands and we trust in you fully. Thank you, Father, that you are the one who is steadfast, who knows what, where, when. We worship and praise you. We pray you help us to keep our eyes focused on you and be led by you.

Kyrie Eleison

Lord, be joy in our sadness, be light in our darkness, be wisdom in our confusion, be familiar when all is unfamiliar. We pray Father, for those who are affected by the ongoing issues with Covid 19. Be with us in our isolation, be close to us in our distancing. Help us make sense of our emotions. Give us the courage to be true and honest about our feelings and come to you with them. We ask you to put your healing hands on anyone who is suffering and sick - from any ailment.

Kyrie Eleison

We pray for guidance, your righteousness guidance for all policy makers. For Governments across the world, for Health Directors, for Economic Decision Makers, for leaders of churches. Closer to home we ask you give wisdom to our Minister Carla and to our Consistoire. Lead them as to next steps for our church. Help us as a congregation to be aware of our fellow parishioners in any way we can - even more so as we cannot meet physically. Lord we ask you keep us safe and pour out your infinite peace on us and release your joy in us.

We pray all these things in your precious name.

Amen