

**The Swiss Church in London**  
**Sunday, 4 October 2021**

**Welcome**

Welcome to the Swiss Church on this autumnal Sunday morning!

„Gott ist Geist; und wo der Geist Gottes ist, da ist Freiheit.“ (2 Cor 3:17) - “God is the Spirit, and where God’s spirit is, there is freedom.” - “Dieu, c'est l'Esprit, et là où est l'Esprit de Dieu, là est la liberté.”

Amen

“People are in principle good at heart.”

“I don’t trust my instincts.”

“God knows everything.”

These are some examples for beliefs or dogmas that we may carry with us. We are all consciously, or unconsciously, equipped with a moral compass that informs our worldview and our decision making. Some of these beliefs are instilled in us from very early life, and others we have adopted later.

What dogmas and belief systems do you carry with you? What is your truth?

Today we want to think about truth. Truth is a double-edged sword. On the one hand it is important to have a faith system that we can build on and that serves us a compass, on the other hand faith systems, if they go unchallenged, can also contribute to the deepening divide between people.

May this following hour bring us closer to truth, but also empower us to challenge what we always believed to be true and liberate us from what holds us back.

Let us pray.

**Prayer**

God of Peace,

long before the earth was formed,  
long after it ceases to exist,  
you have been and you shall always be.  
With you there is no beginning or end.

Eternal God,

break into our short span of existence  
with your eternal love and grace.  
Fill our days of despair  
with hours of joy.

Enable us to discover meaning and purpose  
for our brief appearance in this world.  
Restore in us a deep sense of peace  
as we are gathered here today in our beautiful church.

May your love and that of our friends carry us today  
and all the days of our lives.

Amen

### **Reading**

#### **2 Peter 2:1-3;17-21**

False prophets arose among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive opinions. They will even deny the Master who bought them—bringing swift destruction on themselves. Even so, many will follow their licentious ways, and because of these teachers the way of truth will be maligned. And in their greed they will exploit you with deceptive words. Their condemnation, pronounced against them long ago, has not been idle, and their destruction is not asleep.

These are waterless springs and mists driven by a storm; for them the deepest darkness has been reserved. For they speak bombastic nonsense, and with licentious desires of the flesh they entice people who have just escaped from those who live in error. They promise them freedom, but they themselves are slaves of corruption; for people are slaves to whatever masters them. For if, after they have escaped the defilements of the world through the knowledge of Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and overpowered, the last state has become worse for them than the first. For it would have been better for them never to have known the way of righteousness than, after knowing it, to turn back from the holy commandment that was passed on to them.

### **Sermon**

*Someone tell me what to do!*

Here is an excerpt from an email I wrote this week:

Hi Peter, Hi Lucy

The reading for Sunday is from Peter's second letter, and the topic are false prophets and how in this confusing world we can ever possibly find truth (and you know me well enough by now to know that I won't have an answer... 😊)

Best wishes,  
Carla

I wrote these lines to Peter and Lucy as usual at the beginning of the week so we can coordinate text and music for today's service. I'm sure it comes to no surprise to any of you that when it comes to truth, I'm not one to giving answers, but that my speciality is rather to ask questions and to make us think. Since the beginning of my journey with Christianity, it's always been at the core of my belief, that religion and faith are about questions rather than answers. That's not necessarily the easier way. The world is certainly smoother to navigate with clear-shaped answers and trimmed-to-fit truth. Many people, especially in religion, yearn for someone to deliver answers. Religious movements with moralistic and charismatic leadership are experiencing a massive comeback. Leaders who claim to know the truth are an attractive option in an increasingly confusing world. They provide certainty and purpose.

To a certain extent, I can understand that. I don't know how you felt about the recent pandemic lockdowns, but personally I must confess that despite of all the heartache and separation it brought, I also felt at times weirdly relieved that for once someone just told me what to do. It gave my day a simple and clear structure, and there was no way around it. Since the lifting of the restrictions, I'm again in charge of shaping my daily life, which means taking hundreds of decisions every day. It's exhausting. I sometimes find myself wishing for another lockdown just to hand the decision back over to someone else. Yet I guess in the end of the day I will always choose the rockier path, because it's the path of freedom, and Christ has called us to freedom. He has called us to choose the rocky path.

What leads your decisions?

How do you shape your daily life now that we have gained back most of our freedoms?

Do you ever wish that someone just tells you what to do?

### *Peter's letter*

Today's Bible passage is about false prophets and truth. In Peter's second letter we read about the threat of false teachers, destructive opinions, and deceptive words. We hear about people talking bombastic nonsense, of false promises, erroneous lives, and corruption.

But who are these false teachers? And what truth are they trying to deceive?

Let us have a closer look at the content and context of this letter.

There are two letters in the New Testament that are said to be written by Peter. Peter was one of Jesus' disciples, an eyewitness. However, it is very unlikely that Peter is the actual author of these letters, for several reasons. On the one hand, the language suggests that the letters were written by a scholar, whereas the disciples of Jesus were local fishermen and craftspeople who probably would have used a different language. Secondly, Peter's letter

refers to Apostle Paul's letters, which can also be found in the New Testament, but Paul's letters were only written and circulated two to three decades after the death of Jesus and wouldn't have been known to his disciples. So, we can most certainly say that Peter's letters were written by an unknown second-generation scholar of the early Christian communities, and not by an actual eyewitness. Declaring Peter as their author however was a clever move, as it gave the letters more weight. That's not unusual for the letters in the New Testament. Quite a few are so called pseudo letters that claim to be written by one of the apostles.

### *The Second Coming*

What was the situation of the second-generation Christian communities that they had to resort to such measures?

The survival of the early Christian communities was at stake. Jesus, the Son of God, was dead. His end was brutal and undignified for a saviour. According to some eyewitnesses, he rose from the dead and shared a meal with his disciples before ascending to the heavens. Among first generation Jesus followers the idea soon began to circulate that Christ will return and that his return was imminent, expected to happen within days or weeks, or maximum a few years. But that didn't happen. Christ did not come back. The first generation of Jesus followers died without witnessing the Second Coming of Christ and so, the second generation started to wonder how long the wait would be, if he would ever come again, or if, after all, he wasn't even the saviour that they thought he was.

It became a real challenge for the second-generation communities to staying truthful and committed to Christ and his teachings, and to carrying on the hope and joy that people had experienced in the immediate aftermath. They had to figure out a unified way forward, managing their own disappointed expectations and those of others. This wasn't an easy task for the leaders of the communities. Many different opinions and interpretations began to circulate. That's the context of today's Bible passage we must consider when it says: *"False prophets rose among the people who will secretly bring in destructive opinions. Many will follow them, and the truth will be maligned. They speak bombastic nonsense. They promise freedom, but they themselves are slaves of corruption."*

### *Polarising language*

It's polarising language, 'them' and 'us' language, dividing the world in people who know the truth and those who live in error. It's a language that we know all too well from our daily life. Whether it's climate change, the refugee crisis, the handling of the pandemic or the vaccination programme, many people are quick to choose a side and point fingers at those who don't share their opinions. Of course, it's a good thing to have an opinion, and we should have, but pointing fingers at others and telling them that they speak bombastic nonsense is not helpful. Pointing fingers only deepens the divide and creates rifts that will eventually become almost impossible to overcome, the longer they last, and we experience this currently in our families and friendship circles.

We don't always have to agree with each other, and it's right and good to challenge opinions, our own, those of others, and especially those of authorities. Listening, understanding, debating, and challenging each other is a way to reconciliation and ultimately to shared truth. The more we dismiss other people's views, the more they will feel pushed into their corner. And we all know how it feels to be pushed into a corner. We become defensive, and it's difficult to find a way out.

What leads your decisions and shapes your opinions?

What is your compass that helps you navigate the complexities of life?

What is your truth and how willing are you to have your beliefs challenged?

To ask these questions is part of our journey, and I believe it is a journey that lasts a lifetime. Even if we know our compass, let's say a religion or a philosophy we believe in, opinion leaders, cultures, or ideas we identify with, our circumstances and experiences keep changing and that impacts on how we see and how we relate to truth. That's, I believe, a good thing. We are much better equipped to face the complexities of life and to build bridges if we are not afraid to challenge our belief system. Some of our beliefs remain valid throughout life and will give us a stable foundation, and that's important to navigate life and to have firm roots; but there are also beliefs that hinder us on our journey, the journey of peace, justice, reconciliation, and forgiveness. In God, we are given the freedom and the power to distinguish between the two and to liberate ourselves from what holds us back.

"God is the Spirit, and where God's spirit is, there is freedom." (2 Cor 3:17)

Amen

### **Announcements**

- Greetings from Michelle and Philippe
- Introduce Alex and Giulia?
- Haircuts
- Happy birthday

### **Prayers of Intercession**

We lift our hearts up to you, life-giving God, in praise and thanksgiving for all good gifts around us in this harvest season. May we live in a spirit of gratitude and generosity.

As we count our blessings, our hearts go out to those who do not have, and who are in need. We thank you for plentiful harvests and full refrigerators and ask that you supply the needs of those who are hungry.

We thank you for family and friends who love us and care for us and pray that you would befriend those who are alone.

Loving God, in this season and all year long, give to us the gift of a thankful heart.

*Kyrie Eleison*

God of hope,

you are the God of freedom. You have set us free.

Yet so often we choose to bind ourselves and others to a yoke that is not yours.

Give us eyes to see our invisible chains.

Give us the strength and decisiveness to break free from our chains.

Give us ears to hear the silent cry and hearts to feel the pain  
of those whose lives are trapped.

We pray for those whose lives are in danger because of who they are, what they believe,  
how they identify or the choices they make.

Heal the wounds that we inflict upon each other by means of coercive action and false  
obedience.

*Kyrie Eleison*

We pray for victims of street and domestic violence, and their bereaved families.

We pray for all who grieve.

We pray for all affected by mental or physical poor health and undergoing treatment.

We pray for the lonely.

We pray for the friends and members of our congregation who cannot be with us today.

Let us observe a moment of silence to think of family and friends in our lives who need our  
prayers and thoughts the most.

*Silence*

**Lord's Prayer**

**Blessing**

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