

The Swiss Church in London
Audio service, 7 March 2021

Welcome, by Rev Carla Maurer

“L'Eternel allait devant eux, le jour dans une colonne de nuée pour les guider sur leur chemin, et la nuit dans une colonne de feu pour les éclairer, afin qu'ils puissent marcher jour et nuit.”

“God went in front of the people in a pillar of cloud by day, to lead them along the way, and in a pillar of fire by night, to give them light, so that they may travel by day and by night.”

“Gott zog vor den Menschen her, am Tag in einer Wolkensäule, um sie den rechten Weg zu führen, und bei Nacht in einer Feuersäule, um ihnen zu leuchten, damit sie bei Tag und bei Nacht ziehen konnten.“

(Exodus 13:21)

Dear parishoners, dear friends of the Swiss Church

I am delighted to welcoming you back to the audio services of the Swiss Church in London, and I would like to thank Colin, Marianne and Niccolo for sending in prayers and readings, and to Peter for contributing music.

I must say I find it difficult to say anything at all these days. It's been almost a year since the coronavirus pandemic has changed our lives upside down. Although I do consider myself lucky in many ways, and I know that many of you do, too, I can't ignore the underlying, nagging feeling that something is shifting and that things are going to be different not just for now, but for a long time to come, perhaps even a lifetime. Our way of life is changing fundamentally, the way we socialise, move around, plan, dream and hope, and my mind can't fully grasp the change yet. No one can.

Something has been lost, and when something is lost, it is important that we acknowledge and mourn our loss to set free our inner resources for the way ahead. To be sad, even though we may feel lucky, is an important part of the process that we are all in together.

Recently, I have been contemplating this Bible verse from the book of Exodus a lot: “God went in front of the people in a pillar of cloud by day, to lead them along the way, and in a pillar of fire by night, to give them light, so that they may travel by day and by night.”

May God walk before you and behind you, carry you from beneath and strengthen from within and always hold her blessing hand over you and wrap his warming presence around you.

Let us pray.

Prayer, by Niccolo Aliano

Eternal God, you sent your Son to be our Redeemer, yet we did not recognize him; your Word is our guide, yet we do not hear it; your Spirit gives us life, yet we fail to grasp it.

Help us, we pray, to search our souls for your Spirit and listen to your Word, so that we may rejoice in our hopeful wait for the return of your Son, our Saviour Jesus Christ.

Amen

Reading Luke 12:35-40

“Be dressed ready for service and keep your lamps burning, like servants waiting for their master to return from a wedding banquet, so that when he comes and knocks they can immediately open the door for him. It will be good for those servants whose master finds them watching when he comes. Truly I tell you, he will dress himself to serve, will have them recline at the table and will come and wait on them. It will be good for those servants whose master finds them ready, even if he comes in the middle of the night or toward daybreak. But understand this: If the owner of the house had known at what hour the thief was coming, he would not have let his house be broken into. You also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him.”

Sermon

Numbness

“I just can’t think anymore”, I overheard a woman saying the other day when I was on my run, a run that I had decided to take because I couldn’t think anymore. “It’s like this muscle in my brain has gone all numb”, the woman said. “I know exactly what you mean”, I felt like saying to her.

Many of us feel numb these days. The brain feels blank, which has certainly also to do with the increased amount of screen time and the lack of direct contact with people, but perhaps also with a sense of feeling overwhelmed by it all and uncertainty regarding the future.

We are waiting for change in our own four walls, waiting for the days when we can go back to our old routines, or at least some of them. We are waiting for the days when we can be together with friends and family without having to worry that a hug may harm them. We have been waiting for quite a while now, and it is getting long. How much longer will this go on for? And will it ever be the same?

Stepping into a bible text

I think our current situation really helps us to step into this bible text that we have just heard. It is also about waiting. The death of Jesus Christ has turned the world of his disciples upside down, in a similar way that our world has been turned upside down, in a relatively short amount of time and with huge consequences. The disciples have put all their hopes in Jesus. They have left behind their livelihoods and families to follow his call for a better world. But the man who was meant to be their saviour died on the cross like a common thief, ridiculed and abandoned. During the Lenten season we are preparing to mark these events at Easter. The Lenten season is a time of waiting.

During his lifetime, Jesus had been preparing his friends for what was going to happen to him. He had told them that he was going to die. But he had also told them that he was going to come back, and that they should be prepared for his return.

Two things are important, he said: always be dressed ready for action, and keep the light burning.

Get dressed and be ready

As we are spending most of our time at home waiting and not seeing anyone, it can be tempting to spend our days in pyjamas and shut the blinds.

You might have heard of Jackie Weaver, who became famous overnight a few weeks ago. Jackie Weaver was the facilitator of a zoom parish council meeting that went viral as it descended into chaos. Jackie Weaver was brought in to help manage the conflict situation. Some of the participants gave her a hard time, and yet she remained determined and calm throughout for which she was much admired.

A few days later, Jackie Weaver was invited as a guest on BBC's Women's Hour. The host asked her about her recommendations for zoom meetings, and her first answer was: never wear your pyjama bottoms. Dress properly.

Getting dressed is much more than a necessity. Our clothes are an expression of our personality and they are a way of communicating with the world around us. Clothing doesn't have to be fancy or expensive. What is more important is that we feel like ourselves in whatever we are wearing. Getting up and getting dressed boosts our self-esteem and we are ready for action, ready to face the world, ready to contribute to the world. And that's exactly what Jesus means when he says to his disciples: be dressed ready for service.

Keep your light burning

Jesus also says to his disciples: "keep your light burning. I may come back in the middle of the night, be ready for me." At the time when Jesus was alive, the world was of course much darker. The houses were lit with oil lamps, and there were no streetlights, and certainly no electric switches in every room. So perhaps we shouldn't take this too literally. Don't leave all the lights on in our house overnight. But perhaps you have a little sidelamp that you like to keep switched on.

Because looking at it in a more symbolic way, light makes us feel safe. Light brings clarity and warmth into our houses. It creates a welcoming atmosphere.

Keep the light burning, Jesus says. We can read that in a practical and symbolic way, but also in a spiritual way to keep that inner light burning, to keep our passions and hopes alive. Keep that inner flame alight, even if it feels very small at times. Nurture it with good thoughts and deeds, with prayers and hopes. Nurture it with your faith that things are not going to stay the way they are now forever. Nurture it with your belief in change.

Something has been lost, and the losses are many. Jesus calls us to be ready for his return, the return of our lost dreams and hopes.

If you are member of our Swiss Church WhatsApp group, perhaps you want to send a photo of a light in your house, a lamp or a candle, and of a piece of clothing that you are wearing today, or you can send it to a relative or friend to tell them that you are ready for service. Share with the congregation, with your friends and families that you are ready. Let them know that you are dressed, ready to meet them, and that the light is burning in your house for their return.

“The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it”, Jesus says. (John 1,5)

Amen

Prayers of Intercession, by Marianne Fisher-Hertig

Father, Lord, daddy, papa,

In faith and confidence we declare you are steadfast - always the same; yesterday, today, tomorrow.

We thank you for this assurance and we hold on to it. We praise you and adore you, we give you glory. Despite the lasting present situation, we acknowledge you are Lord.

Father, some of us are struggling, some are totally fed up, some of us don't understand any longer and we miss so much not meeting in our church and seeing each other.

We pray we are able to draw near to you. Help us to hold on to you. Give us the courage to keep on speaking with you. We thank you for the free will you

have given us, however, we pray keep on revealing yourself more and more and more to each one of us.

We ask for your wisdom and guidance on Carla and the consistoire on how to come out of lockdown. Show them when it's safe and wise to meet in church again and we ask show them the way ahead for the future. May they be aware of your presence and your voice. Bless and protect them.

We lift up people to you who are not well in any way; physical, emotional, spiritual. Lord of comfort, be with them and stretch your healing hand out over them. Draw close to them and to each one of us.

Your Kingdom come - on earth as in heaven

On earth - in us and with us as in heaven

On earth - in and over the Swiss church as in heaven Your Kingdom come - on earth as in heaven. Amen