

**The Swiss Church in London
Sunday service, 15 March 2020
Recorded message for those at home**

**For I am the Lord your God
who takes hold of your right hand
and says to you, Do not fear;
I will help you.
I will take hold of your hand.**

**Car c'est moi, l'Eternel, qui suis ton Dieu,
je saisis ta main droite,
je te dis: Sois sans crainte,
je suis là pour t'aider.
et je te tiendrai par la main**

**Denn ich, der Herr, dein Gott, ergreife deine rechte Hand und sage dir: Fürchte
dich nicht; ich helfe dir! und ergreife dich bei deiner Hand.**

(Isaiah 41:13/42:6)

Dear Swiss Church congregation, Dear friends

I never thought the day would come when I address you with a voice message and advice you to stay at home instead of coming to church on Sunday.

For me the Sunday service is the heartbeat of our church, the seed out of which all things grow, the foundation of our faith. I love being together with you. You are great company and a source of wisdom

However, your safety and your health are paramount, and the current spreading of an aggressive virus requires cautiousness and the slowing down of our activities.

We know that elderly people are particularly at risk and as a sign of solidarity we are all asked to help slowing down the spreading of the virus so those who will be more seriously affected than others and are in need of medical assistance and emergency services receive the support they need.

I will be at the church on Sunday as usual, but I advise those in the risk group to stay at home, read a book, listen to the radio or talk to a friend, all whilst taking the necessary precautions.

This is not a time to panic, nor to be anxious, though some will be, and please don't hesitate to speak to me if you are experiencing anxiety. It is a time to be cautious and to slow down in solidarity with those who are affected and will be affected, and with our health services who are preparing for an increasing number of emergencies.

So, for the near future let us come together in prayer and worship in new ways, ways that reduce the risk of infection.

Of course, if you choose to come to church on Sunday, I will be more than happy to see you. It is your choice. This voice message shall be an alternative way of worship to stay connected for those who choose to stay at home.

Whether in person, in print or via voice message, I wish you all a blessed Sunday. Stay well.

Loving God,

I thank you for your constant guidance throughout my life, for the assurance that you are always there to encourage, strengthen and support me. I praise you for the many ways I have found that to be true; the strength you have given in times of weakness, encouragement in times of fear, support in times of difficulty, faith in times of doubt.

Teach me through all I have experienced to trust you more completely in the future, confident that whatever may be asked of me, your hand will hold me firm and see me through.

Amen

Reading

Philippians 2:5-11, The Christ Hymn

Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus,

who, though he was in the form of God,

did not regard equality with God

as something to be exploited,

but emptied himself,

taking the form of a slave,

being born in human likeness.

And being found in human form,
he humbled himself
and became obedient to the point of death—
even death on a cross.
Therefore, God also highly exalted him
and gave him the name
that is above every name,
so that at the name of Jesus
every knee should bend,
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,
and every tongue should confess
that Jesus Christ is Lord,
to the glory of God the Father.

Address by Reverend Carla Maurer

Today at church we are going to think about the Christ hymn in Paul's letter to the Philippians. For me this is one of the most moving and important texts in the Bible. There is a reason for that. I seem to remember almost each word of it. Why is that?

When I was a student of theology we once took this hymn apart sentence by sentence. The professor had printed out some of the phrases on individual sheets of paper and had put them on the floor. We were asked to walk around, read them all and then choose the one that spoke most to us. We then told each other why we had chosen a particular phrase. The Christ hymn came to life through all the different voices and associations.

In church today we will read the hymn in the same way, and I would like to encourage you to do the same at home.

Here are some phrases from the Christ hymn. Read them, ponder for a moment, and then chose the one that speaks most to you.

Being born in human likeness.

He emptied himself.

He humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death- even death on a cross.

God gave him the name that is above every name.

Every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth.

Which sentence speaks most to you and why?

I remember when I was a student the sentence that caught my attention most was: **He humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death- even death on a cross.** Reading this sentence on its own made me realise how extraordinary a message this is: that God is portrayed as humble and obedient, and that he does not shy away from the dark sides of human life. Here, God is vulnerable, even powerless. He feels the pain that is part of life. It suddenly came to me in such clarity never felt before that God's death on the Cross in Jesus Christ is the utmost expression of humility and surrender. It's almost as if he surrenders to us. **He emptied himself for us.** What a God! A God that was prepared to walk with us was a God that I felt I could surrender to. I felt that this was a God that I could bend my knee for as **every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth.**

At the heart of the Christian faith stands that God became one of us, in Jesus Christ. Suddenly God was not the distant mysterious voice anymore, but he was tangible and left his very own footprint on this earth.

If God became one of us, **born in human likeness**, what are we humans then? I was thinking how I would define being human. We are born into this world from a place we cannot remember, and we will leave this world for a place we do not know. This can be pretty scary if you think of it. More than that we are conscious beings and therefore very well aware that our life is limited. At the same time, we don't know what life will bring, what heartache we have to suffer, what joys will come our way. We experience sadness and joy. we sometimes lose orientation and lose all hope. Human life is a crazy and unpredictable journey. In Jesus Christ God goes this journey with us. **He did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited.** Perhaps Jesus could have made concessions, found an easier way, could have negotiated his earthly life, but he did not. He did not rise above himself.

He did not rise above us. He was a different kind of King, not one with a crown of gold and an ornamented palace.

Each of our life's journey is different. This is incredible if you think how many people live today and have lived before us! We all look different, feel different and make different experiences, and yet we share that we are all human beings. We all have a name. God calls us by our name which makes us unique. To live means to respond to that call even though we might not always understand the direction or hear the voice. We are called by our name and we answer with every breath and every step we take. We are being led and yet actively shaping our life.

What is your calling?

Jesus was called by his name to take the burdens and joys of each and every human being upon himself. **God gave Jesus the name that is above every name.**

I have shared with you some thoughts on the individual phrases of the Christ hymn, and you have made your own thoughts. Now I invite you to once again read the Christ hymn and observe if anything has changed, if the hymn in its entirety perhaps has gained in clarity.

Amen

Life-giving God

We pray for the children, women and men who hunger.

You give in abundance and yet everyday thousands of people die from starvation.

We pray for the mothers and fathers who cannot feed their children, who hold their crying babies in their arms.

We pray for the families in this country who struggle to put food on the table.

We pray for fair distributions of the plentiful resources of our planet.

Open our eyes so we may see what we can do to help.

We pray for our community and particularly for those who follow our Sunday service from home today.

We pray for those who are ill, bed bound or in hospital.

We pray for our friends who mourn.

**Healing God, keep us safe and send your Holy Spirit so we can all be together
even when we are apart.**

**We pray for the doctors and nurses, hospital staff and governance who are
preparing for the consequences of the fast spreading Corona virus.
Keep them safe and give them strength and wisdom for this enormous task.**

Together we pray:

Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those who sin against us.
Lead us not into temptation
but deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power,
and the glory are yours
now and for ever.
Amen.

Blessing

Gott segne und behüte Dich.
Gott lasse sein Angesicht leuchten über Dir und sei Dir gnädig.
Gott hebe sein Angesicht auf Dich und gebe Dir seinen Frieden.

Que Dieu te bénisse et te protège.
Que Dieu fasse briller sur toi son visage, qu'il se penche vers toi.
Que Dieu tourne vers toi son visage, qu'il t'apporte la paix !

God bless you and keep you.
God make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you.
God lift his countenance upon you and give you peace.

Amen