

The Swiss Church in London, 18 October 2020

Welcome

“Ich habe Dich bei Deinem Namen gerufen, ich, die Gottheit Israels! Ich rüste Dich aus, obwohl Du mich nicht kennst.” (Jesaja 45:4.5)

“I call you by your name, I, God of Israel. I arm you, though you do not know me.”

“Je suis l'Eternel, celui qui t'appelle par ton nom, le Dieu d'Israël. Je t'ai équipé pour le combat alors que tu ne me connaissais pas.”

Welcome to today's Sunday service at our lovely Swiss Church, and a special welcome to Lucas who will be baptised today, and to his family and friends.

God calls us by our name, each one of us. We are not just an anonymous number among millions of people. We are a precious gift, unique and loved the way we are. God knew us even before we knew him, Prophet Isaiah says.

This is a message for our bathroom mirror, a message we should read out loud to ourselves every morning, especially on days when we feel down and when we feel unseen and unloved. If we believe in ourselves as a precious, unique, God-given gift, then we will also be able to see the precious gift in others. Every human being is a gift from God.

I chose this Bible quote today because it's a fundamental aspect of baptism: God calls us by our name and knew us before we knew him. We are firmly rooted in God, no matter what life throws at us, and no matter how other people judge us. In God, our feet will not slip, and our steps will hold fast on the path of life.

Let us pray.

Prayer

Loving God,
You gave us the great commission to continue your work of reconciliation and to live in peace and harmony with each other and with your Creation.

In a time when we are required to stay physically apart, draw us ever closer together in spirit and soul. We give thanks for the gift of being together today, and we are grateful for Lucas who will be baptised in your name today.

Guide us as we seek to uncover the path of life and peace.
Give us patience when your pace seems too slow to us.
Keep us hopeful. Keep us thankful.
Never let us go.

Amen

Reading Joshua 1:1-6a

After the death of Moses, God spoke to Joshua son of Nun, Moses' assistant, saying, "My servant Moses is dead. Now proceed to cross the Jordan, you and all this people, into the land that I am giving to them, to the Israelites. Every place that the sole of your foot will tread upon I have given to you, as I promised to Moses. From the wilderness and the Lebanon as far as the great river, the river Euphrates, all the land of the Hittites, to the Great Sea in the west shall be your territory. No one shall be able to stand against you all the days of your life. As I was with Moses, so I will be with you; I will not fail you or forsake you. Be strong and courageous!

Baptism of Lucas Kobler

Lucas has chosen as his baptism verse words from the Book of Joshua: "Remember that I have commanded you to be determined and confident!" May God be your compass as you navigate life, may he fill you with confidence and may he light in you the fire of compassion and forgiveness, and may he keep you safely in the palm of his hand.

God bless you and keep you. God let his face shine upon you and be gracious to you. God lift his countenance upon you, and give you peace." Amen

Lighting of the baptism candle - Prayer by Lucas's mother

Reading Philippians 3:10-16

I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the sharing of his sufferings by becoming like him in his death, if somehow I may attain the resurrection from the dead.

Not that I have already obtained this or have already reached the goal; but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. Beloved, I do not consider that I have made it my own; but this one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus. Let those of us then who are mature be of the same mind; and if you think differently about anything, this too God will reveal to you. Only let us hold fast to what we have attained.

Sermon

Life is a crossroad

Life is a crossroad. If we pause for a moment and look around us, there is always a turn to take, always a decision to make, a door to open. Sometimes we are forced down a certain path and decisions are made for us. Sometimes we can freely choose which way to go. Sometimes the path we want to take is closed and we have to choose a different direction. But even if we are on a path we don't necessarily want to be, within that path we still have choices, however small they may be. We can choose to look at things in a certain way. We can choose to make the smallest amendments to our daily life that make our situation

perhaps more bearable, more hopeful. We can choose how we treat other people and ourselves. We can choose to trust in what's yet to come.

That's not always easy and some situations can make us lose hope and even our willingness to live. Perhaps in those moments it can be comforting to know that the protagonists of the Bible, God's people, have not always found it easy either. They sometimes lost their trust in life and have turned away from God. The Bible is a book of crossroads, of decisions big and small, a book of big hopes and broken dreams, of trust and despair- in short: our way with God.

Past, present, future

For his baptism day, Lucas has chosen a verse from the Book of Joshua: "Remember that I have commanded you to be determined and confident!" These words are spoken at a crucial moment in the history of Israel, God's people, as they are standing on a hill in the desert. In front of them they can see the river Jordan, and across the Jordan the Promised Land where milk and honey flows, the land that God had promised to them for settling down and finding peace.

Behind them however a very different picture. The Israelites look back on generations of slavery. They look back on a perilous journey of 40 years through the desert. On their journey they have had bitter arguments, they had lost loved ones, and they had lost hope both in their leader Moses and in God. At some point they even turned away from God to worship the Golden Calf. There are moments in all our lives when we lose trust. That was no different for the Israelites thousands of years ago as it is for us today. But as they were standing on that hill, the land of hope ahead of them, and the trauma of the past behind them, their trust in God was once again restored. God says to the exhausted yet hopeful Israelites: "No one shall be able to stand against you all the days of your life. As I was with Moses, so I will be with you; I will not fail you or forsake you." Such is our journey with God, sometimes rocky, sometimes confusing, yet always rooted in God's promise that he will be with us.

God sometimes disappears from our view. Sometimes we even wonder if God cares about us at all, or if God is nothing but imagination. God is not always what we expect her to be, tangible one day, hidden the next. There is no scientific proof for God. Our relationship with God is a matter of faith, and faith is a journey, transformative and changeable, like the seasons.

Make faith your own

Today's second reading is a letter that Apostle Paul wrote from prison to his Christian brothers and sisters in Philippi. He didn't know whether he would spend his last few weeks within the prison walls or if he will see the sunshine again. From this state of uncertainty, he writes his letters to tell other Christians of the one thing that keeps him going: the power of Christ's resurrection. However, he clearly has his doubts. He says: "*I want to know Christ, I want to know the power of his resurrection, and somehow attain it myself.*" Yet he honestly

says that he doesn't think he has reached this goal yet. He wants to press on to make it his own.

For me there are two very interesting aspects in Paul's letter:

For one, he speaks about "*making faith his own*". Faith in God and faith in the power of Christ's resurrection, which is the victory of life over death, the ultimate hope, is not some shipshape template to slip into and wear like a uniform. We have to make faith our own. We have to find our own way, our own words, what it means to us and what makes sense to us. Read the Bible and find out what stories you like and dislike and ask yourself why; discuss with your friends what God means to you, and find out how you can communicate or relate to God. Make faith your own, Paul says.

And secondly, Paul speaks about "*forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead*". He encourages us to let go of the things we cannot change and to leave behind the things that drag us back in order to live now and hope for the future. Although I must say that I partly disagree with Paul here. I don't think we should forget our past – we can't anyway. Rather, we should learn from our past and integrate it as we move forward.

Wanting to know

The journey with God is an exciting and challenging journey. One of the most important aspects for me is that it brings us together with people from all walks of lives that we otherwise would never meet. This can also be irritating as others may express their faith in a different manner. But choosing the path of irritation – rather than shying away and only mixing with people who think alike – will broaden our horizon and make us more tolerant. Being part of a church community is an excellent way to keep challenging ourselves and the way we think. What unites on our journey, in Apostle Paul's words, is our attempt to *wanting to know Christ and the power of his resurrection*.

Wanting to know is an excellent start to our journey with God, and we can go it in the faith that God calls us by our name, unique and precious as we are.

Amen

Prayers of Intercession

God of the hidden things

We pray, open our minds for the world that lies beyond infection rates and social distancing guidelines. Our world is suffering so much. Refugees are left to die on the Mediterranean Sea; the world's rain forests are destroyed at an uncontrollable speed; children are dying from hunger; economies are coming to a standstill leaving masses of people unemployed.

We pray, gracious God, open our minds for the human and natural disasters that no longer make the news. Your world needs our thoughts and prayers now more than ever. Liberate

us from ill-founded anxieties and one-dimensional worldviews. May we be your witnesses in this world and further justice and peace in all areas of life as you have called us to do.

Kyrie Eleison

Healing God

We pray for all those who are seriously ill and who are preparing for their last journey as their life comes to an end. May they be surrounded by people they love in a safe and peaceful environment.

We pray for the people whose medical treatments have been cancelled or delayed due to the pandemic, and who are suffering from the consequences of those delays. We pray for those in need of psychological support whose counselling has been halted. Give them strength to heal and look forward. We pray for those who have lost their employment, especially we pray for people in the creative industries, in music, theatre and art, who are facing a very unknown future.

God, we pray, strengthen your Church so we may be a place of refuge and safety for those who need it most.

Kyrie Eleison

Prayer from Lucas:

Dear God, I pray that now more than ever people can feel comforted by your Holy Spirit. In these days where nothing is certain and so much sadness has occurred, I pray that you can give us all strength to carry on and see better days return in the future. I pray that everyone at this Church will see the hardships that they face as opportunities to strengthen their faith, and that you can guide and help them through it. To everybody here, I pray that them and their loved ones stay safe and healthy, so that even when every story in the news is bad, we at least have the people around us to make things better. I pray this all in your name.

Amen

Lord's Prayer

Blessing

May the living God be by your side, no matter how helpless or hopeless you feel. May the Lord look upon you gently, soften your heart and make you whole.

The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you; the Lord lift up his 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 sein Angesicht leuchten über dir und sei dir gnädig; Gott hebe sein Angesicht über dich und gebe dir Frieden. Amen