

## HANNOVER INTERNATIONAL WORSHIP

April 18th, 2021 11.30 Petri Church Hannover

### Order of Service

Music John Rutter - Anthem: Look at the world  
Welcome  
Psalm 96  
Prayer  
Reading NT Luke 24,1-12  
The Apostles' Creed  
**Hymn Christ has arisen, Alleluia (tune EG 116)**  
Reading NT Col 1,15-23  
**Hymn Good Christians all, rejoice and sing (tune EG 103)**  
Sermon  
**Hymn Thine be the glory, risen, conquering Son**  
Announcements  
Prayer of intercession & the Lord's Prayer  
**Hymn The Lord bless us and keep us**  
Blessing  
Music The Lord's My Shepherd  
'Crimond' by Jessie Seymour Irvine

### Reading NT Col 1.15-23

15 The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation.  
16 For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him.  
17 He is before all things, and in him all things hold together.  
18 And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy.  
19 For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him,  
20 and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.  
21 Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior. 22 But now he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation— 23 if you continue in your faith, established and firm, and do not move from the hope held out in the gospel. This is the gospel that you heard and that has been proclaimed to every creature under heaven, and of which I, Paul, have become a servant.

**Hymn Good Christians all, rejoice and sing (tune EG 103)**

Sermon: Dr. Vera Christina Pabst  
 Date: Sermon for Sunday April 18<sup>th</sup>, 2021  
 Place: Ev.-luth. Petrikerche, Hannover  
 Text: Col 1,15  
 Theme: Singing a song/s of hope in 2021

**Grace and peace to you from God our Father.** (Col 1.2b)

Every evening at 6 pm, doors and windows were opened. People stepped outside onto their balconies and began to sing: “Bella ciao, bella ciao, bella ciao, ciao, ciao”. The song became well-known when it was adopted by the partisans, the Italian resistance of World War II, as their anthem against the Nazi occupation. In March 2020 that very song echoed through the Italian streets of villages and cities again. It now brought the people together in their fight against the invisible enemy, the new Corona virus. Those constrained to the four walls of their flats took comfort in being united in that ritual, and in the melody and the words that had set the minds and hearts of earlier generations free.

From Italy, the idea spread first from country to country in Europe, then around the world. Singing and making music together from balconies and from the roof tops, on the streets, and in the court yards ... it united families, neighbourhoods and strangers. It strengthened those playing and singing as well as those listening. It

encouraged them not to give up against the unknown illness, the unspeakable suffering and the uncountable deaths. –

Lay and professional musicians wrote songs. On May 4<sup>th</sup>, 2020 the Chicago Tribune<sup>1</sup> published a list of 40 songs about the coronavirus pandemic that had been released over the course of only six weeks. They took up the themes of life in quarantine, of social distancing, feeling sad, confused and distraught. To give you an idea, here are a few examples as The Chicago Tribune presented them:

OneRepublic wrote “Better Days”, a rap song about self-quarantining. Randy Newman focussed on social distancing in “Stay Away”. In “Six Feet Apart” the country singer Luke Combs tackled the simple things we are currently missing in life in quarantine.

The country singer Adam Hambrick published “Between Me and the End of the World” to describe his wife’s work who, as a physician’s assistant, had to test people for COVID-19. Bon Jovi wrote “Do What You Can” after volunteering at his own community restaurant, encouraging everyone to lend a hand. Bono wrote “Let Your Love Be Known” after being inspired by Italians quarantined during the outbreak.

Other artists decided to make use of their previous works: Songs were re-recorded or remixed to reflect the mood of a world overtaken by the coronavirus. Gloria Estefan put new words to her famous song

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.chicagotribune.com/entertainment/music/ct-ent-coronavirus-songs-20200504-r4jdtacc2jakpoecfwqah3hzzu-story.html> (10/04/2021)

which is now entitled “Put Your Mask On!” and it lists the precautions to be taken to prevent the spread of Covid-19.

The Chicago Tribune webpage provided a playlist of the tracks and links so that you could immediately listen to the messages of encouragement and comfort yourself, lightening up your mood, starting your own little disco night at home, singing and dancing by yourself and yet together with others in isolation.

And if you are not into Country, Disco, Pop, Rock or Rap... you might remember Igor Levit streaming piano concerts from home, choirs and orchestras singing together via zoom, forwarded as messages of unity and hope on your smartphone.

Musicians of different genres and generations used their creativity and fame to inform about the new virus, to encourage perseverance, to comfort the lonely and the bereaved, to promote standing together during these challenging times.

Radio stations and music providers like Spotify and Apple Music compiled “Corona-sound-lists” with popular songs that had proven to be comforting in other times of crises.

It is a renowned practice to take up famous songs and adjusting the words to fit the current situation. If you are familiar with the tune, you remember the words more easily. Adopting melodies and songs, writing new hymns to well-known tunes has been used by Christian musicians and theologians from the very beginning.

Therefore, I want to take you back to the first century. During their time of crisis, the first generation of Christians in Colosse and the surrounding area received a letter in which a well-known hymn was quoted. Epaphras, one of Paul’s co-workers, was originally from the area: He was the first one to bring the Good News, the message of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, into their homes. Men and women, masters and slaves shared their new belief and their lives in an innovative way. Their community was shaped by faith, love and hope. They were united in the conviction that Jesus Christ was their Lord and Saviour. They shared the desire to understand more what his will is, so that they could live their daily lives accordingly. Reading the first lines of the letter to the Christians of Colosse you get the feeling: There are lots of reasons to be grateful for in these small congregations gathering there in the house churches.

However, it isn’t always easy to spell out all the consequences of the Christian faith for the different situations of your daily life, especially if you are new to the faith. It isn’t always easy to live in the fellowship of His love and to be guided by the hope of the resurrection if you have been brought up with a different worldview. Discussions on the nature of Jesus Christ led to misunderstanding. Differing opinions of people with influence caused friction. Some said you need secret wisdom to understand God fully. Seeds of doubt were sown among the young Christians. The origin of the disputes and the arguments of the opposing parties cannot be exactly identified.

However, what we do know is: The congregation was experiencing a crisis. Therefore, this letter was sent to them so that they could better understand what their hope is built on and what would encourage them to persevere in their Christian faith and to continually live it day by day.

Paul and his friends, the authors of the letter, were familiar with the situation in Colosse, they knew the first traditions that had been established and their present challenges. They knew the writings that have been circulated amongst the young Christians and on which they had built their faith. On the grounds of these writings, they meant to encourage them by drawing their attention to Jesus Christ. They wanted to paint the picture of Him as the One who has the ultimate power over all creation, over life and death, so that doubts were cast away, that the young Christians would continue to put their trust in the Good News as it was proclaimed to them at the very beginning.

What would be better to encourage them than to remind them of a well-known hymn on the supremacy of Christ and to add a few lines of explanation? The hymn – as it has come down to us in the letter to the Colossians – is divided into two parts, one could say it has two stanzas: 1. Christ's supremacy in creation (V. 15-17) and 2. Christ's supremacy in redemption (V.18-20).

“He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation” is the first line of that hymn. Though the song is all about Jesus' supremacy vindicated through HIS death and resurrection,

the words of the hymn take us back – past the events of first Easter – back to the very beginning of creation. What was a familiar argument to those well-versed in the books of Wisdom about the Word and Creation is now applied to Jesus Christ. It doesn't take the hymn a lot of words to open up a whole theology of God's creation.

In other words: If you are seeking God and want to learn more about Him and His plan for mankind, turn to Jesus Christ as He represents the invisible God like no other. From the very beginning of time, it was His unique relationship to the Creator as His Son that gave Him the power over all powers in heaven and on earth. Therefore, you don't have to fear any other power. Not even the power of your own guilt and shame, as God has provided redemption and reconciliation in HIM once and for all, when His blood was shed on the Cross. Therefore, the hymn referred to in this letter is – in a way – one of the earliest Easter hymns, a song of comfort and encouragement for Christians in crisis.

It is unfortunate that we cannot join the Christians of Colosse in singing their very hymn as neither the exact words – without any further comments – nor the melody have come down to us.

Thankfully though, many other hymns praising God as the Creator and relating the Easter events, hymns from different centuries and from different continents have been brought to us today by Dietmar Zeretzke and the Petri choir so that we get an idea in how many ways the message of the death and resurrection of

Jesus Christ, of encouragement and hope has been expressed by Christians around the world. What an important reminder on the day that Germany commemorates the lives lost to Covid-19!

Maybe there is a tune or two that will keep ringing in your ear, that you find yourself humming in the course of the week when you are in need of comfort or of help to persevere in your day to day live. So please feel free to take the order of worship home with you. Maybe one of today's hymns is your Easter song 2021 to help you stick the Covid-19 crisis out just a little longer and to celebrate the victory of life over death – humming or singing!

In closing, I want to draw your attention to an event that happened yesterday and today, 500 years ago, to the day. On April 17<sup>th</sup> and April 18<sup>th</sup>, 1521, a monk of the Augustinian order appeared as ordered before the Diet of Worms, the general assembly of the estates of the Holy Roman Empire. In the presence of the presiding Emperor Charles V, Martin Luther was presented with copies of his writings. He was asked if the books were his and whether he stood by their contents. As professor of theology from Wittenberg, Luther confirmed that he was their author, but he also requested time to think about the answer to the second question. Back at his lodgings he prayed, consulted friends, and gave his response the next day, April 18<sup>th</sup>. In the presence of all the authorities of his day and age he said: "Unless I am convinced by the testimony of the Scriptures or by clear reason (for I do not trust either in the pope or in councils alone,

since it is well-known that they have often erred and contradicted themselves), I am bound by the Scriptures I have quoted and my conscience is captive to the Word of God. I cannot and will not recant anything, since it is neither safe nor right to go against conscience. May God help me. Amen."

Thereby, he refused to recant his writings. Finally, he was condemned as a heretic and declared an outlaw, his literature banned and an arrest warrant sent out. Just two years later, Martin Luther wrote the first words of a hymn to a well-known tune, commemorating the death of two monks who had been killed for their new understanding of the Gospel. It was the first of many hymns to come by Martin Luther – written so that not only the authorities of the world and of the church – the emperors, the electors and dukes, the archbishops and princes – but the common man, woman and child would come to know the convictions he was willing to die for. By composing hymns Martin Luther wanted the ordinary people to understand the Gospel in the same way he had. As a counsellor to many he wanted them, thereby, to overcome the fears and anxieties ruling their everyday lives by focussing on the risen, conquering Son.

As much as I appreciate the efforts of the singers and song writers of today, the stars and the artists yet to become famous, most of their works focus on human strengths. More than a year into the pandemic, in the midst of a third wave, I am afraid that calling on reason, on our understanding and asking for more patience, trusting

in our own strength, ... is asking a lot – actually too much for most of us. In their time of severe crisis, the Christians of Colosse were encouraged to turn to Jesus and to seek strength by trusting in Him.

So if you have any idea of how to express your Christian faith and your confidence in the resurrection in a way that would attract other people's attention, so if you come up with words that would fit a popular tune of our time, a song on the radio, on Spotify or Apple tunes, give it a try, write your own song of encouragement. Share your faith, strengthen those feeling tired and helpless by your own hymn of hope!

If you come up with words that comfort and help your family and friends to put their trust in God in these difficult times, I believe Dr. Martin Luther would smile encouragingly at you! And you would stand on the shoulders of him who – like Paul and others – so effectively used the very same method to spread the Good News in times of crisis, to young and old, and from generation to generation, and to worship the risen conquering Son!

The peace of God that passes all understanding keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. **Amen.**

**Hymn      Thine be the glory, risen, conquering Son**

Announcements

Collection for Isiphambano Centre for Biblical Justice

<https://www.isiphambano.com/>