

Radio 4 Sunday Worship

Stand up to hatred

**A service from St Martin-in-the-Fields in the week
of Holocaust Memorial Day and on the feast of the
Conversion of St Paul led by the Revd Nicholas
Holtam with Rabbi Lionel Blue**

Director of Music: Andrew Earis

Organist: Martin Ford

Producer: Stephen Shipley

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Radio 4 Opening Announcement: BBC Radio 4. And now it's time for Sunday Worship on the Feast of the Conversion of St Paul. It comes live from St Martin-in-the-Fields in London and is led by the Vicar, the Revd Nicholas Holtam, with Rabbi Lionel Blue. The service begins with words by St Paul: 'Love does not rejoice in wrongdoing but rejoices in the truth.'

**Choir: Love does not rejoice in wrongdoing but rejoices in the truth
(Andrew Earis)**

Nicholas Holtam:

“Love does not rejoice in wrongdoing but rejoices in the truth”, words from chapter 13 of St Paul’s first letter to the Corinthians. Good morning and welcome to St Martin-in-the-Fields.

Tuesday is Holocaust Memorial Day, remembering the extermination of 6 million Jews – gay people, gypsies and others too - by the Nazis, most of whom would have thought themselves to be Christian. In November the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Chief Rabbi made a joint visit with a group of young people to the site of the concentration camp at Auschwitz. On the Sunday Programme that week, here on Radio 4, the Bishop of Leicester, who went with them, said that visiting Auschwitz felt uneasy because it wasn’t like looking at a museum but as if they were looking into a mirror and seeing what we human beings are capable of doing to each other and in some parts of the world are still doing to each other. Genocide was a repeated horror in the last century.

This year’s Holocaust Memorial Day will make many of us uncomfortable because the Middle East is still not at peace. But the theme of the day, ‘Stand up to Hatred’, is intended to help us find human solidarity and the courage to speak out against injustice. There is a political dimension to this and a spiritual one. For religious people both are rooted in our faith in the one God. So this morning we join together in worship singing ‘The God of Abraham praise’, this version written in 1400 by Daniel ben Judah Dayyan: ‘He hath eternal life implanted in the soul; His love shall be our strength and stay while ages roll’.

Hymn:

The God of Abraham praise, all praised be his name,
Who was, and is, and is to be, for aye the same!
The one eternal God, 'ere aught that now appears;
The First, the Last: beyond all thought His timeless years!

His spirit floweth free, high surging where it will;
In prophet's word he spoke of old, he speaketh still.
Established is his law, and changeless it shall stand,
Deep writ upon the human heart, on sea or land.

He hath eternal life implanted in the soul;
His love shall be our strength and stay while ages roll.
Praise to the living God! all praises be his name,
Who was, and is, and is to be, for aye the same!

Words by: Daniel ben Judah Dayyan, 1400

Nicholas Holtam:

Let us pray.

O Lord the source of wisdom, truth and love throughout the ages, strengthen our sense of unity and the bonds of peace. Give us courage and the determination to live peaceably with one another that we may find our unity in you our Lord and God. **Amen.**

Today the Christian Church marks the Feast of the Conversion of St Paul. His conversion on the road to Damascus led Paul, who like Jesus was a Jew, to become the Apostle to the Gentiles, the non-Jewish world. His letters to the churches are a major part of the New Testament.

As a creative and energetic missionary St Paul proclaimed Christianity in the Mediterranean world, founding congregations in some of the major cities. When, after a short time he moved on, those who had been baptised were left to work out the implications of their faith “in fear and trembling”. Some of the most intriguing passages in his letters deal with their questions – about death, sex, money, integrity, their relationship with non-believers and people of other faiths. It’s not difficult to see why he still speaks to us across the ages. Imprisoned, ship-wrecked and sent for trial in Rome he did not lack courage. The last, and by his own admission least of all the apostles, he lived in the conviction that ‘God was in Christ reconciling the world.’ St Paul was one of the greatest of God’s messengers.

Choir: How lovely are the messengers (Mendelssohn)

*[How lovely are the messengers that preach us the gospel of peace.
To all the nations is gone forth the sound of their words, throughout all the lands their
glad tidings. Romans 10, vv. 15 & 18]*

Nicholas Holtam:

“How lovely are the messengers that preach us the gospel of peace” words from St Paul’s letter to the Romans and set to music in his oratorio ‘St Paul’ by Mendelssohn.

The impact of St Paul down the ages has been immense. His epistle to the Romans, the last of his letters and the closest we get to a systematic theology from him, was the major influence on Augustine, Luther, Calvin; and it was what was being read by the Moravians gathered in Aldersgate Street here in London when John Wesley’s heart was “strangely warmed”. In Paul’s life, his personal struggle and wrestling with God brought him to understand in ways few others come near to matching, that some things are eternal. This sublime passage from

1 Corinthians 13, about love as the more excellent way, is one of the purple passages of the New Testament.

Reader:

Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never ends. But as for prophecies, they will come to an end; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will come to an end. For we know only in part, and we prophesy only in part; but when the complete comes, the partial will come to an end. When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child; when I became an adult, I put an end to childish ways. For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then we will see face to face. Now I know only in part; then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known. And now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; and the greatest of these is love.

Hymn:

Make me a channel of your peace.
Where there is hatred let me bring your love;
Where there is injury your pardon, Lord;
And where there's doubt true faith in you.

*Oh, Master grant that I may never seek
So much to be consoled as to console;
To be understood as to understand;
To be loved as to love with all my soul.*

Make me a channel of your peace.
Where there's despair in life let me bring hope;
Where there is darkness, only light;
And where there's sadness, ever joy.

*Oh, Master grant that I may never seek
So much to be consoled as to console;
To be understood as to understand;
To be loved as to love with all my soul.*

Make me a channel of your peace.
It is in pardoning that we are pardoned;
In giving to all people we receive;
And in dying that we're born to eternal life.

Nicholas Holtam:

'Make me a channel of your peace, where there is hatred let me bring your love, where there is injury your pardon, Lord' - a prayer attributed to St Francis of Assisi.

It matters that people listen carefully to God. It's so easy to distort the message, to hear what we want to hear and use religion for our own purposes as another tool in the power game by which one group dominates another. If religion is part of the problem of what divides human beings, religion also has to be part of the solution that teaches us to live harmoniously with one another. When the issues at stake are life and death to us, it is tempting to allow conflict to define us. The certainty of the zealot can give moral purpose and appear very attractive, particularly if you feel the underdog. In the midst of so much religious noise and strife, it's important to hear the stories of people who were zealous in their religious faith and who remained sensitive so they could hear the quiet voice of God. In the first Book of Kings chapter 19, Elijah travelled forty days and forty nights to Horeb, the mount of God.

Reader:

He came to a cave, and spent the night there. Then the word of the LORD came to him, saying, "What are you doing here, Elijah?" He answered, "I have been very zealous for the LORD, the God of hosts; for the Israelites have forsaken your covenant, thrown down your altars, and killed your prophets with the sword. I alone am left, and they are seeking my life, to take it away."

He said, "Go out and stand on the mountain before the LORD, for the LORD is about to pass by." Now there was a great wind, so strong that it was splitting mountains and breaking rocks in pieces before the LORD, but the LORD was not in the wind; and after the wind an earthquake, but the LORD was not in the earthquake; and after the earthquake a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire; and after the fire a sound of sheer silence.

Nicholas Holtam:

Tuesday this week is Holocaust Memorial Day. It beggars belief that people could do such terrible things, yet there's also a fascination that we are capable of it. 'Where was God in the Holocaust?' was one of the most troubling theological questions of the twentieth century. Some of the most persuasive answers were not in the earthquake, wind or fire but in the still small voice. As a young curate nearly thirty years ago I had the extraordinary privilege of being the Christian chaplain to the London Jewish Hospital in Stepney Green, in London's East End. It gave me contact with people who had survived with wonderful resilience and mostly without bitterness. Stepney was where our preacher grew up in the years of the Second World War. There the individual survivors and the whole Jewish community had to work out how to live with and beyond their experience of the Holocaust, as Rabbi Lionel Blue is going to explore.

Rabbi Lionel Blue: Address 1

Shivering with cold during the Second World War, I took refuge in semi-heated public libraries till closing time, reading everything and anything.

Which is how I stumbled across this sentence by Nietzsche the German philosopher who fascinated Hitler. 'Don't gaze too long into the abyss' he wrote 'lest the abyss gaze into you.' I knew what he meant. The horror of the holocaust, its sadism, its madness had gazed into me even before the war though I lived in safe England which actually didn't feel that safe. I remember anti-Semitic insults daubed on Jewish streets. 'Perish Judah' scrawled on synagogues and my father planning my route home from school through Jewish streets so I didn't get roughed up.

The horror intensified as the refugees from the Nazis arrived in London's poor Jewish east end, each with a more terrifying tale to tell. That was when my nightmares began. And that is why seventy years later I still cannot bring myself to visit Auschwitz, Belsen and Birkenau or watch Ann Frank on TV. I was so sure Britain would be invaded and I would share her fate.

The first things the holocaust collapsed were my comforting childhood beliefs. So many prayers must have been said in the trucks to the camps. How many had been answered in any way I could understand – so why pray? And where was God in that increasing horror? Was he sleeping, dozing, drunk, or just couldn't be bothered? So I gave up this useless god and marched with the reds instead.

The holocaust also made me cynical about religious establishments. Every army good bad and murderous in the last world war had received a blessing, every horrific regime a religious legitimization. Since they couldn't even spot evil in front of their noses, I washed my hands of them.

The abyss also collapsed my belief in myself. A fascist band came marching down the street. My mother thrust me into a doorway to protect me. I remember secretly wanting to join them and play a fascist drum myself. I was fed up with being a persecuted Jew. I wanted to be on the winning side for a change. It was then I began to hate myself because I'd discovered a bit of a Nazi in me too. There's probably a bit in most of us. It's safer to acknowledge it.

The abyss Nietzsche talked about questioned me ever more closely. Later on the question began to take this form. 'What would you had done,' it said, 'if the Nazis had only shot gypsies, tortured gays and imprisoned liberals but had left Jews alone and you were a rabbi in Berlin? Would you have sacrificed your career or would you have looked the other way?' I don't know but sometimes I still torture myself with guilt for a situation I never had to face. Thank God!

Choir: Psalm 23 (Gerald Cohen)

Rabbi Lionel Blue: Address 2

[That was Gerald Cohen's setting of Psalm 23, "The Lord's my shepherd".]

After the war I had to cross into Germany a country I'd always avoided because it was a Jewish charnel house, the abyss I feared. But there a strange thing happened. The abyss seemed to turn inside out, a common experience when we ask God's help to confront our fears. I even began to see little lights of self sacrifice and love shine in it. The more touching because they came from ordinary people I met as I hitchhiked across the ruins of the Third Reich.

A woman returned to her Berlin flat in 1943. 'Get out, get out' cried the courageous concierge, the Gestapo have come.' The woman tore off her Jewish badge and walked the streets in despair, finally knocking on the door of a school friend of long ago. The friend gasped but didn't telephone the police but a bureau for bombed out people to get her a new Aryan identity. That was the price of friendship in those times.

And there was the man in the train who asked me to reunite him with his daughter. When the synagogues were torched in 1938 he'd tried to put out the flames. A friend warned him to make his peace with the Party for the sake of his wife and children. So he'd joined the Party and now his daughter wouldn't speak to him. 'Tell her how bad it was at that time' he said urgently 'she might believe you,' which I did. Would I have risked my family to put out the flames?

In a gay bar I listened to stories of friends hidden and saved from torture in the dark time. Would I have walked on the other side?

I remember Rabbi Leo Baeck who in September 1939 turned back into Germany. His duty lay with his shattered congregation.

I remember a Jewish doctor urging an elderly patient to vote in the new democratic election. 'Frau Dr.' she said 'I only voted once before and look at the suffering I caused especially to you who has been so good to me. I am too stupid to vote.'

And there was the pastor who issued baptismal certificates to delay deportation and the gentile wives of Jewish husbands who demonstrated outside Gestapo offices.

Here are some lessons I learnt from my visit to Germany. Some of the angry questions I hurled at God boomeranged back at me. Why had he not taken a hand in that terrible time? Because we human beings are the only hands he has to redeem this world.

I learnt from the Holocaust to beware of crude nationalism; love your country and your culture but don't try to love your own more by loving others less. That way lies murder whether in the Balkans, the Holy Land, the Congo or wherever.

I no longer cared if God was all powerful or all anything. It was enough to watch his goodness at work transfiguring people. As I returned to England the words of Nietzsche were replaced by the word of the agnostic Roman Emperor Marcus Aurelius whom I'd also bumped into in those wartime libraries. 'I've known the nature of the good' he wrote, 'and saw that it was beautiful. I have known the nature of evil and saw it was ugly.' I can only add 'And me too!'

My unofficial saints helped me take my first small step out of my prison of anger and hate. Their lights were my guiding stars.

Hymn:

All One more step along the world I go,
one more step along the world I go;
from the old things to the new
keep me traveling along with you:
***And it's from the old I travel to the new;
keep me traveling along with you.***

Choir As I travel through the bad and good,
keep me traveling the way I should;
where I see no way to go
you'll be telling me the way, I know: ***Refrain***

Choir Give me courage when the world is rough,
keep me loving though the world is tough;
leap and sing in all I do,
keep me traveling along with you: ***Refrain***

All You are older than the world can be,
you are younger than the life in me;
ever old and ever new,
keep me traveling along with you: ***Refrain***

Nicholas Holtam:

That song by Sydney Carter makes for a disarmingly child-like repost to the horrors of the Holocaust: "Give me courage when the world is rough, keep me loving though the world is tough".

Let us pray

First, we light this memorial candle for the victims of the holocaust.

Lionel Blue:

God full of compassion, whose presence is over us, may the souls of all the victims who have gone to their everlasting home with the holy and pure on high who shine as the lights of heaven, find the safety and rest denied them on earth beneath the shelter of Your presence. Master of mercy, cover them in the shelter of Your wings forever, and bind their souls into the gathering of life. It is the Lord who is their heritage. May they be at peace in their place of rest.

**All sing: Bless the Lord my Soul, and bless God's Holy name
Bless the Lord my Soul, who leads me into life.**

Nicholas Holtam: We pray for all victims of injustice and violence, for Palestinians and Israelis; for the peace keepers and the peace makers. May we strive for that more excellent way of life and be people who live by faith, hope and love. Give us that unity which knows each other as neighbours, forgives when we have been hurt by others, and seeks the conversion of what is selfish and creates enmity.

**All sing: Bless the Lord my Soul, and bless God's Holy name
Bless the Lord my Soul, who leads me into life.**

Nicholas Holtam: We pray for President Obama and ask, Heavenly Father, that you give us a vision of our world as your love would make it: A world where the weak are protected and none go hungry or poor; A world where the benefits of civilised life are shared, and everyone can enjoy them; A world where different races, nations and cultures live in tolerance and mutual respect; A world where peace is built with justice, and justice is guided by love; And give us the inspiration and courage to build it, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

**All sing: Bless the Lord my Soul, and bless God's Holy name
Bless the Lord my Soul, who leads me into life.**

And we pray in the words Jesus gave his disciples,

**All Our Father in heaven,
Hallowed be your name,
Your kingdom come,
Your will be done,
On earth as it is 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**

Hymn: God is Love, let heaven adore him;
God is Love, let earth rejoice;
let creation sing before him
and exalt him with one voice.
God who laid the earth's foundation,
God who spread the heavens above,
God who breathes through all creation:
God is Love, eternal Love.

God is Love; and love enfolds us,
all the world in one embrace:
with unfailing grasp God holds us,
every child of every race.
And when human hearts are breaking
under sorrow's iron rod,
then we find that self-same aching
deep within the heart of God.

God is Love; and though with blindness
sin afflicts all human life,
God's eternal loving kindness
guides us through our earthly strife.
Sin and death and hell shall never
o'er us final triumph gain;
God is Love, so Love forever
o'er the universe must reign.

Nicholas Holtam: The Lord bless you and keep you,

Lionel Blue: The Lord make his face to shine upon you and be gracious
to you

Nicholas Holtam: The Lord look kindly and give you peace.

Lionel Blue: My brothers,

Nicholas Holtam: My sisters,

Both: May the Lord bless you. **Amen**

Organ voluntary

Radio 4 Closing Announcement: Sunday Worship came live this morning from St Martin-in-the-Fields. It was led by the Revd Nicholas Holtam with Rabbi Lionel Blue. The choir was directed by Andrew Earis and the organist was Martin Ford. The producer was Stephen Shipley.

Next week, Sunday Worship comes from Knock Methodist Church in East Belfast.

Radio 4 Trail: Persecution is the theme of [today's] Sunday Worship on the day when the Church marks the Conversion of the Apostle Paul. It's also the week of Holocaust Memorial Day and Rabbi Lionel Blue will be reflecting on this time of painful remembrance. That's 'Stand up to Hatred' – [this morning's] Sunday Worship live from St Martin-in-the-Fields at ten past eight, here on BBC Radio 4.

