

19th April 2020

Hearsall at Home

Hello, and welcome to Hearsall at Home.

We hope that you listen to this service either on a Sunday morning, or at another time, and you will worship, sing, pray and reflect on the scriptures along with all of us.

A written copy of the service is also available as a download on our website, so if you know anyone who would like that please let us know.

So sit down, relax and prepare yourself to worship God with us.

Order of Service 19th April 2020

Peace in the Pandemic

Call to Worship

Let's draw ourselves to worship by saying together these words from Psalm 91, verses 1 - 7.

- 1 Whoever dwells in the shelter of the Most High
will rest in the shadow of the Almighty.
- 2 I will say of the Lord, 'He is my refuge and my fortress,
my God, in whom I trust.'

- 3 Surely he will save you
from the fowler's snare
and from the deadly pestilence.
- 4 He will cover you with his feathers,
and under his wings you will find refuge;
his faithfulness will be your shield and rampart.
- 5 You will not fear the terror of night,
nor the arrow that flies by day,
6 nor the pestilence that stalks in the darkness,
nor the plague that destroys at midday.
- 7 A thousand may fall at your side,
ten thousand at your right hand,
but it will not come near you.

We reflect that theme of God's faithful saving power in the words of our hymn...

Hymn (BPW 389)

Our God, our help in ages past,
Our hope for years to come,
Our shelter from the stormy blast,
And our eternal home.

Under the shadow of Thy throne
your saints have lived secure;
Sufficient is your arm alone,
And our defence is sure.

Before the hills in order stood,
Or earth received her frame,
From everlasting you are God,
To endless years the same.

A thousand ages in your sight
Are like an evening gone;
Short as the watch that ends the night
Before the rising sun.

Time, like an ever-rolling stream,
Bears all its sons away;
They fly, forgotten, as a dream
Dies at the opening day.

O God, our help in ages past,
Our hope for years to come,
Be Thou our guard while troubles last,
And our eternal home.

Prayer

Let us pray together.

Heavenly Father we thank you today for your great faithfulness. In Jesus Christ you rescue us from the guilt of sin and by your Holy Spirit you keep us from its power. And yet we confess that we, so often, willingly disregard your love and choose to take our fate upon ourselves. We speak and act and think as those without eternal hope. For these and all our sins, forgive us, for the sake of Jesus Christ, our Lord and Saviour.

And now we thank and praise you that, in your Son Jesus, you meet us in our locked rooms, on our journeys, in our dejected conversation and when we have given up hope. We praise and adore you, for you bring bright hope into our gloomiest nights and glorious beauty into our most dismal days. We rest in your presence today. Open our eyes to your glory, our hearts to your love and our bodies to your healing power. Come Lord, save us and bless us for we depend on you. Amen.

We join together in the words of the Lord's Prayer:

Our Father in heaven
hallowed be your name.
Your kingdom come; your will be done
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread
and forgive us our sins
as you forgive those who sin against us.
And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil

For the kingdom, the power and the glory are yours.
Now and forever. Amen.

Behind Closed Doors

This week's Behind Closed Doors is from Sarah Lewis, and she adds her own subtitle: *Home Alone!*

Behind closed doors – home alone!

When I first heard that the government was to ask extremely vulnerable people to self isolate totally for 12 weeks my brain went into a mush. Having received a very successful kidney transplant nearly 30 years ago, I have no immune system and so I knew I would be classed as extremely vulnerable to COVID-19. Personally and professionally I have developed an interest and expertise in well-being, but I am the worst in applying it to myself! However I have five key points which are keeping me going, though I still confess I have bad days but more good days.

Cats – I am totally cat crazy and I am proud to introduce my four feline housemates, all adopted from rescue centres. They give me company and friendship and most of all a purpose. Lulu, black and white very small aged 11; Freddie ginger and white a real scaredy-cat aged 9; Winton, age nine, totally black and large; and finally Emily aged seven, black and white and the boss. I worry more about running out of cat food than I do my own (As Martin found out recently when I introduced him to the world of buying cat biscuits!) Hopefully during the lockdown I will finally get time to dust the nearly 200 cat ornaments I have around my house!

Routine – The first day of lockdown I decided to have a pyjama day and felt dreadful. I got up late and routine totally went out of the window. The only change I have allowed myself is I prefer to get up late and go to bed late so my day begins at about 8:30 and ends around midnight (unlike the usual 6:30 till 10). I have certain clothes for certain days (be at work, relaxing, church et cetera) and maintain a lot of my old routine. Sunday evening is still long soak in the bath night; Monday morning is still housework time for example. I have friends who have no routine and just “go with how they feel” but I prefer routine.

Exercise – Ever since my transplant I have prided myself on my exercise routine. Originally road running but more recently inside at the gym which I attend normally up to 4 times a week. So my gym has had to come to my house! I am fortunate in that I had a range of weights already; I currently do up to 2 Joe Wicks fitness routines most days; I do combat (mixed martial arts) to music on the radio complete with my boxing gloves; have purchased a yoga video and downloaded beginners pilates; and yesterday I went for a walk of just under a mile. Mind you, 100 lengths of my back garden got a bit tedious! As many of you know I had a recent heart procedure and now exercise has a special place of importance for me.

Friends – I have reconnected with old school friends and university colleagues and taken the time to begin to make inroads into my list of people who I really meant to ring but never had time! In addition, of course, my church friends, usual friends and work colleagues have been great for chatting and face timing. I also like to keep in touch with other transplant recipient friends as they share the frustrations of 12 weeks totally behind closed doors.

Work – oh yes I better mention Work! I am the equality, diversity and inclusion manager at Coventry University working four days a week and I'm fortunate that I can still do my job from home (though I really miss the buzzing student environment and work colleagues). Working from home used to be a bit of a relaxed day but now with all the online communication it is more tiring than actually being in situ. Dashing from one Skype meeting to another on Zoom to Microsoft teams and trying to get on the remote work Desktop makes a hectic schedule, not to mention the usual work. I do enjoy the work and it adds to my routine, although having a new boss on the first day of lockdown was not ideal.

Council – I must say a huge thanks to the city council and their shield program which Julia mentioned at deacons meeting. This ensures that all extremely vulnerable people have basic essentials for food and toiletries. My online shopping delivery company are still not picking me up from the government website as extremely vulnerable, meaning I cannot order food, so the shield program has been a lifeline.

Faith – Finally in my list but most definitely not in importance is my faith which surrounds all of the other issues. I confess I have questions about why this is happening and why so many good people are dying, but overall I know that God is always there and when I am down I chat with him. I pray that in the long term good will come out of the situation; that we will become less commercially sick, less obsessed with having the latest gadget, realise that we can cope without flying to the other side of the world and adding to the destruction of the environment and that we will keep the friendships we have built with people we have never spoken to before.

Just to finish, I mentioned at the start that we were to be asked to self isolate for 12 weeks and I began a countdown to June 13. However I have fast realised that there is unlikely to be a total release of all extremely vulnerable people on that day and that I may face many more weeks behind closed doors. But do you know what? It has become my new way. I am dreaming of that walk in the park and going round the local Co-op picking out what I want, not what I need, but hey ho, it will happen – one day.

Sarah Lewis
Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Manager

Coventry University

Thanks Sarah for your honest, quirky and helpful thoughts.

In this season of Easter we share a resurrection song. *He Has Risen!*

He has risen
He has risen
He has risen
Jesus is alive

When the life flowed from His body
Seemed like Jesus' mission failed
But His sacrifice accomplished
Vict'ry over sin and hell

In the grave God did not leave Him
For His body to decay
Raised to life - the Great Awakening
Satan's pow'r He overcame

If there were no resurrection
We ourselves could not be raised
But the son of God is living
So our hope is not in vain

When the Lord rides out of heaven
Mighty angels at His side
They will sound the final trumpet
From the grave we shall arise

He has given life immortal
We shall see Him face to face
Through eternity we'll praise Him
Christ the champion of our faith

Offering

Lord, every good and perfect gift comes down from you, our Heavenly Father, and we thank you for the joy of being able to reflect your generosity in our gifts to church and charity. Use all of our gifts to bring hope and peace into our world during this pandemic time. Amen

Intercessions

Eric Bremner has prepared our intercessions and they are read by Annie Leonard.

Almighty God, you are the God for whom all things are possible. You have power over all things, all living beings are subject to your Love and control. We thank you for your strength and guidance and love and care thus far in all of our lives. We thank you for the good times and for the strength to overcome during the bad times. We thank you that, whatever our circumstance, faith and love continue unchanged.

At this time when many of our nations and our peoples feel at great risk from a new enemy we know little about, we ask for your special strength and guidance.

Lord be with our world leaders, give them wisdom and insights as never before to make the right decisions in respect of the welfare of the people within their care.

Lord be with Scientists and Immunologists and Researchers as they race to find a cure or an immunisation against coronavirus.

Lord be with Doctors, nurses and others delivering care to the sick. We thank you for their continued dedication and commitment and concern for every one of us who are sick and need their care, keep them safe Lord.

Lord we thank you for all people on the front line of helping others in supply of care, whether the elderly or the disadvantaged, or everyone who needs care, food and support, keep them safe Lord.

Lord we ask for the wellbeing of all persons and families who lose jobs and incomes and their very ability to live and survive put at risk, help us all to help them.

Lord we ask for all who have loved ones who are ill or those who have lost loved ones without a chance to say goodbye, give them special comfort.

Lord we ask for our Church family, keep them safe and thank you for the encouragement of them all.

Lord we commit the very future of many people into your hands at a time that we struggle in trying to understand what the future holds.

Lord help us all to be a great strength to those that are struggling under great burdens and if we ourselves need help grant us the grace to ask for it and receive it.

We ask in the name of Jesus Christ who suffered unspeakable tortures to make for us a way back to God Almighty. Amen.

Bible readings

Colossians 3: 12 - 17

12 Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. 13 Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. 14 And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.

15 Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful. 16 Let the message of Christ dwell among

you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts. 17 And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

John 20: 19 - 31

19 On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jewish leaders, Jesus came and stood among them and said, 'Peace be with you!' 20 After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord.

21 Again Jesus said, 'Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.' 22 And with that he breathed on them and said, 'Receive the Holy Spirit. 23 If you forgive anyone's sins, their sins are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven.'

24 Now Thomas (also known as Didymus[a]), one of the Twelve, was not with the disciples when Jesus came. 25 So the other disciples told him, 'We have seen the Lord!'

But he said to them, 'Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe.'

26 A week later his disciples were in the house again, and Thomas was with them. Though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, 'Peace be with you!' 27 Then he said to Thomas, 'Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe.'

28 Thomas said to him, 'My Lord and my God!'

29 Then Jesus told him, 'Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.'

30 Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. 31 But these are written that you may believe[b] that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

Let's draw comfort from the rescuing presence of Jesus with us in this time of pandemic as we sing our next hymn, *I know that my Redeemer lives*.

Hymn (BPW 251)

I know that my Redeemer lives;

What joy the blest assurance gives!

He lives, He lives, who once was dead;
He lives, my everlasting Head.

He lives to bless me with His love,
He lives to plead for me above.
He lives my hungry soul to feed,
He lives to help in time of need.

He lives and grants me daily breath;
He lives, and I shall conquer death:
He lives my mansion to prepare;
He lives to lead me safely there.

He lives, all glory to His Name!
He lives, my Saviour, still the same.
What joy the blest assurance gives,
I know that my Redeemer lives!

Sermon

Peace in the Pandemic

In my regular life as a minister, I am blessed with a pleasant balance between solitude and company. It suits my personality so well, poised as I am between introvert and extravert. The introvert in me loves the study, prayer and preparation; whilst then the extravert loves to mingle with groups and make pastoral visits.

So how do I find peace in the pandemic? It's tough. I have discovered that somewhere in my brain there is a human-contact monitor. It adds up in a kind of aggregate score the total number of people I've encountered: how many handshakes I've had; how many embraces; how many kisses; how many grandchildren I've wrestled with.

And this explains why, like Sarah in her piece, I find it so hard to go to bed. My human-contact monitor says: ZERO! And so my whole body-mind-soul complex says: NO - it can't possibly be time to settle down...

So I can't easily find that sense of peace, so on a bad night I end up asking Alexa to put on the Archers and hope I'll drop off listening to Linda Snell coping with the challenges of recovering from her recent trauma...

But, as my girlfriend is fond of reminding me on the phone, we're all in the same boat. But again, as I inwardly retort, actually we're all in different boats, and that's the

problem. My challenges are not the same as yours. I wonder what aspect of lockdown you find hardest.

Some are in 'boats' that are harder than mine by several orders of magnitude: overworked politicians; nurses ministering to those whose life hangs in the balance; those whose partner died only in the last few weeks. Yes, their boats are much tougher than mine, and yet I can only deal with my boat, and I don't find that easy.

The upper room experience was a kind of lockdown for the ten disciples present when Jesus first appeared. And three times in our reading we hear Jesus say, Peace be with you. John, as he wrote this up, must have thought it was a key point of these resurrection appearances that his audience needed to hear.

The second time we hear it, John depicts Jesus communicating three aspects of that peace. Maybe some are useful to me now. Maybe they might be useful to you, too.

To be honest, the first point is not very promising. He sends the disciples out. As the Father sent me, I am sending you. Well those apostles (as we should now technically call them) and their associates were sent, taking the good news of Christ to Samaria, Asia Minor, Syria, Greece and Rome; and then to Spain and Africa and even India.

So real peace does not come from hiding behind locked doors for fear. Real peace comes as we engage with the world at large.

The part of me, at night time, that doesn't want to go to bed does not feel peace, because it knows that normally, face-to-face social interaction is integral to my day. How can I be a part of life, if I am locked away? Real peace comes from a full-blooded engagement with society.

So I must train myself to turn my usual thinking on its head. The fact that no one has visited me is not because I am not loved, but because I am. The fact that I have not attended the luncheon club at church or the Stanza poetry group in the Broomfield Tavern is not because I don't want to engage with life, but because I do. I want as many of us as possible to be still alive when all this is over, so there are still lunch clubs, poetry groups, pubs and churches to go to.

Peace I give to you, so STAY HOME as Jesus might say right now.

Now the second point about peace is, on the face of it, even less helpful in our pandemic. Jesus breathed on the disciples. Face masks weren't even on the agenda. He breathed on them! We could be arrested for following his example literally.

But Jesus is of course indicating something much deeper by his dramatic action. As his physical breath would have entered the body of his disciples, so his Spirit would enter their hearts and minds and souls, breath and spirit being the same word in Hebrew and Greek.

Now these were no perfect men. We are talking about unfaithful deniers, men who had fallen asleep as Jesus prayed, who had scattered when the arresting force came for their Master.

And yet, confused, afraid, sinners as they are, Jesus gives them the intimate gift of the Holy Spirit. I reckon this implies a forgiving of their sins, don't you? And an acceptance of who they were, how they were, warts and all... Jesus forgives them, and breathes his Spirit on them, just as they are.

Perhaps this is more promising for me in my pandemic bedtime meltdown. As I am, still grieving a bit for my wife, wanting my girlfriend, missing my grandchildren; even on the worst of bad nights when I just can't settle, Jesus would come and breathe his Spirit on me. He forgives me my sins and pours his love into my muddled, hurting heart.

To sin is to fail to live as if we are loved, whereas we are loved to the uttermost by God. To sin is to refuse to let myself be loved, because I don't think I'm presentable enough to let Jesus in. So if you're going through any tough things right now - remember, Jesus does not wait for you to sort yourself out. He would come to you now, just as you are.

The third point morphs from the second. Having been forgiven, these men must now forgive. They are told that, if they forgive others their sins, they are forgiven; and if they do not forgive, they are not forgiven!

In other words guys - embody, carry, talk about, prove, live out this message of forgiveness. Grace - the free forgiveness of God - is the only thing that can sort out the muddle of people's lives. Sin is like a sticky oil that gets in our hair and on our hands and it's often far from clear who poured the oil into our situation in the first place. Jesus comes and just washes it all off.

So does the theme of peace-through-forgiveness speak to me in this time of pandemic? Well it does. It gives me time to reflect on my own life.

We may have skeletons in our cupboards, Things we've known God's forgiveness for, but we've never quite forgiven ourselves for. Or we may have unforgiveness towards others in our lives. Partners, parents, children and others can sin against us badly and leave scars that last a lifetime.

Ruth would have been 61 on Monday just gone, and, to mark the occasion, I collected together some of her writing to email to her family and friends. Looking back through it all, I remembered things I'd regretted doing or saying.

It's one thing to say that Jesus forgives me. It's another to forgive myself. And at those dark times, when no one else is around, and no one has been around all day, well those things can come back to haunt us. But who steps into our locked upper bedtime room; who, but Jesus?

How can we learn to live in the grace of forgiveness and so find peace in this time of pandemic? Forgiveness is not the same as letting an offender off the hook, or go unpunished. But it is about aligning ourselves with the love of Jesus who gives us all permission to live after all that has gone wrong.

Serious sins may be forgiven instantly by Jesus, but for us it can take a long time. Here's one way of thinking of it. Think of an attitude of forgiveness as a suit of clothes. In Colossians chapter 3, these clothes are called compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, patience and love. With these clothes on, the text says, forgive as the Lord forgave you.

We may not be ready to wear these clothes all day when we think of a sinner - whether ourselves or someone else - who we want to forgive. Very well, put them on for five minutes every day for a week. Wear them for half an hour a day for the second week. And gradually you'll realise how comfortable and smooth and warm and most of all, beautiful these clothes are. As time goes on, you won't want to wear anything else.

So for me, in this time of pandemic, I can learn to wear these soft, forgiving clothes for myself and for anyone who comes to mind as unforgiven in my heart. Is it a season for some of you to do something similar, I wonder?

Let's close with a well-known George Herbert poem, Love (III):

*Love bade me welcome. Yet my soul drew back
 Guilty of dust and sin.
But quick-eyed Love, observing me grow slack
 From my first entrance in,
Drew nearer to me, sweetly questioning,
 If I lacked any thing.*

*A guest, I answered, worthy to be here:
 Love said, You shall be he.
I the unkind, ungrateful? Ah my dear,
 I cannot look on thee.*

*Love took my hand, and smiling did reply,
Who made the eyes but I?*

*Truth Lord, but I have marred them: let my shame
Go where it doth deserve.
And know you not, says Love, who bore the blame?
My dear, then I will serve.
You must sit down, says Love, and taste my meat:
So I did sit and eat.*

Our closing hymn is that bold exploration of the saving power of God: In Christ Alone.

Song

In Christ alone my hope is found,
He is my light, my strength, my song
This Cornerstone, this solid Ground
Firm through the fiercest drought and storm.
What heights of love, what depths of peace
When fears are stilled, when strivings cease
My Comforter, my All in All
Here in the love of Christ I stand.

In Christ alone! - who took on flesh,
Fullness of God in helpless babe.
This gift of love and righteousness,
Scorned by the ones He came to save
Till on that cross as Jesus died,
All talk of wrath was laid aside,*
For every sin on Him was laid
Here in the death of Christ I live.

There in the ground His body lay,
Light of the world by darkness slain:
Then bursting forth in glorious day
Up from the grave He rose again
And as He stands in victory
Sin's curse has lost its grip on me,
For I am His and He is mine
Bought with the precious blood of Christ

No guilt in life, no fear in death,

This is the power of Christ in me
From life's first cry to final breath,
Jesus commands my destiny
No power of hell, no scheme of man,
Can ever pluck me from His hand
Till He returns or calls me home
Here in the power of Christ I'll stand.

** I have taken the liberty of editing the original version of this line of the song which has: 'The Wrath of God was satisfied', a line which I find too narrow, and if considered in isolation, able to give a pastorally dangerous picture of God.*

The Grace

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ;
the love of God;
and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit
be with us all
now and always. Amen.

Sung blessing

May the peace of the Lord Christ go with you
wherever he may send you;
may he guide you through the wilderness,
protect you through the storm;
may he bring you home rejoicing
at the wonders he has shown you;
may he bring you home rejoicing
once again into our doors.