

Order of Service 13th March 2022

When the going gets tough...

Welcome

Hello, and welcome to Hearsall at Home for 13th March 2022. Today we consider how to hold on to our faith in challenging times.... When the going gets tough...

Call to Worship

20 ... our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Saviour from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, 21 who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.
Philippians 3: 20 - 21

The Lord, who created the entire universe, gave his life to call us home to our heavenly reward. His greatness no one can fathom, and we praise him in our opening hymn, *How Great Thou Art...*

Hymn (BPW 62) **How Great Thou Art**

O Lord my God, when I in awesome wonder
Consider all the works thy hands have made,
I see the stars, I hear the mighty thunder,
Thy power throughout the universe displayed;

Chorus

*Then sings my soul, my Saviour God, to thee,
How great Thou art, How great Thou art!
Then sings my soul, my Saviour God, to thee,
How great Thou art, How great Thou art!*

When through the woods and forest glades I wander
And hear the birds sing sweetly in the trees;
When I look down from lofty mountain grandeur,
And hear the brook, and feel the gentle breeze;

Chorus

*Then sings my soul, my Saviour God, to thee,
How great Thou art, How great Thou art!*

*Then sings my soul, my Saviour God, to thee,
How great Thou art, How great Thou art!*

And when I think that God his Son not sparing,
Sent Him to die - I scarce can take it in,
That on the cross my burden gladly bearing,
He bled and died to take away my sin:

Chorus

When Christ shall come with shout of acclamation
And take me home – what joy shall fill my heart!
Then shall I bow in humble adoration
And there proclaim, my God, how great thou art!

Chorus

*Then sings my soul, my Saviour God, to thee,
How great Thou art, How great Thou art!*

*Then sings my soul, my Saviour God, to thee,
How great Thou art, How great Thou art!*

Prayers of Adoration and Confession

THE MOTHER HEN (Carmen Bernos de Gasztold)

Oh! What a worrit!

All these chicks

to cherish and protect

can't shut an eye

even for a moment!

That one strays too far,

those two big ones quarrel

and this tiny one isn't strong.

I should like to keep them always under my wings,

but they must learn how to live. That dreadful cat!
Never trust a cat! And all these feet
tramping round my brood.
Beware! Hen pecks!
I'm going to lose my temper!
Lord,
my heart is so choked
with loving care,
how can I say
Amen?

* * *

Lord, are we the hen or the chick?
Teach us to accept your motherly embrace of protection.
Forgive us for our independent attitudes.
Teach us to offer your protection to others.
Forgive us for our uncaring attitudes.
Amen

The Lord's Prayer

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.

Offering

Lord, in a world of suffering and injustice, make us generous givers. Receive the offerings we make this week and bring blessing into our world through them. Amen.

We sing two songs of worship as we express our devotion to God...

Songs (WT 200) **I Will Worship** segue into... (WT 90) **Father, I Adore You**

Verse 1

I will worship (I will worship)

With all of my heart. (With all of my heart.)

I will praise You (I will praise You)

With all of my strength. (All my strength.)

I will seek You (I will seek You)

All of my days. (All of my days.)

I will follow (I will follow)

All of Your ways. (All Your ways.)

Chorus

I will give You all my worship,

I will give You all my praise.

You alone I long to worship,

You alone are worthy of my praise.

Verse 2

I will bow down (I will bow down)

And hail You as King. (And hail You as King.)

I will serve You; (I will serve You;)

Give You everything. (Everything)

I will lift up (I will lift up)

My eyes to Your throne. (My eyes to Your throne.)

I will trust You, (I will trust You,)

Trust You alone. (You alone)

Chorus X2

I will give You all my worship,

I will give You all my praise.

You alone I long to worship,

You alone are worthy of my praise.

Song (WT 90) **Father, I Adore You**

Verse 1

Father, I adore You,

Lay my life before You,

How I love You.

Verse 1 again **(as a round)**

Verse 2 **(as a round)**

Jesus, I adore You,

Lay my life before You,

How I love You.

Verse 3 **(as a round)**

Spirit, I adore You,

Lay my life before You,

How I love You.

Our prayers of intercession this week are led by Roger Woodward.

Prayers of Intercession

There is no such thing as Jew and Greek, slave and freeman, male and female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. *Galatians 3:28*

Father God, as we watch the news from Ukraine, our eyes fill with tears, our hearts pound within us, our minds are in a whirlwind. We cannot imagine how you must feel looking out over your beautiful world that is being destroyed. We see a mother pulling a suitcase and holding tightly to two young, bewildered children as they cross from a land they love into a unknown place.

We see a father, with tears in his eyes, as he pushes his wife and child onto a train knowing that this could be the last time he will see them and they see him. We see a young soldier, far from home, killing people and destroying buildings. In government buildings throughout the world, we see leaders conferring together, some seeking ways of peace, others planning further destruction.

You made us one family:

Lord, show all people how to love.

In the wider world, you look out and see the refugee, escaping violence and injustice, oppression and war, earthquake and famine, seeking asylum, needing shelter, food and clothing and challenging us to work for peace and justice.

You made us one family:

Lord, show all people how to love.

You see the homeless on our streets.

We pass by, aware of our guilt but not knowing what to do.

You made us one family:

Lord, show all people how to love.

Father, you come as the stranger, a newcomer to our town, and maybe our church; you come as a visitor from another part of our country or another part of the world. You challenge our prejudice, our indifference and apathy, hoping that we shall respond with love and respect, welcoming you into our fellowship and into the hospitality of our homes.

You made us one family:

Lord, show all people how to love.

Lord Jesus Christ, you are here in our community; in the sick and house-bound, the bereaved, lonely and depressed, in the mentally ill and all who are handicapped, the battered wife and the abused child. You are unemployed. You are here, in our midst, longing for our time, our understanding, our friendship and our love.

You made us one family:

Lord, show all people how to love.

Amen

Many thanks Roger for those prayers. We hear our Bible readings now from the Psalms and from Luke.

Bible Readings

Psalm 27

Of David.

¹ The LORD is my light and my salvation –
whom shall I fear?

The LORD is the stronghold of my life –
of whom shall I be afraid?

² When the wicked advance against me
to devour me,

it is my enemies and my foes
who will stumble and fall.

³ Though an army besiege me,
my heart will not fear;

though war break out against me,
even then I will be confident.

⁴ One thing I ask from the LORD,
this only do I seek:

that I may dwell in the house of the LORD
all the days of my life,

to gaze on the beauty of the LORD
and to seek him in his temple.

⁵ For in the day of trouble

he will keep me safe in his dwelling;
he will hide me in the shelter of his sacred tent
and set me high upon a rock.

- ⁶ Then my head will be exalted
above the enemies who surround me;
at his sacred tent I will sacrifice with shouts of joy;
I will sing and make music to the LORD.
- ⁷ Hear my voice when I call, LORD;
be merciful to me and answer me.
- ⁸ My heart says of you, 'Seek his face!'
Your face, LORD, I will seek.
- ⁹ Do not hide your face from me,
do not turn your servant away in anger;
you have been my helper.
Do not reject me or forsake me,
God my Saviour.
- ¹⁰ Though my father and mother forsake me,
the LORD will receive me.
- ¹¹ Teach me your way, LORD;
lead me in a straight path
because of my oppressors.
- ¹² Do not hand me over to the desire of my foes,
for false witnesses rise up against me,
spouting malicious accusations.
- ¹³ I remain confident of this:
I will see the goodness of the LORD
in the land of the living.
- ¹⁴ Wait for the LORD;
be strong and take heart
and wait for the LORD.

Luke 13:31-35

Jesus' sorrow for Jerusalem

³¹ At that time some Pharisees came to Jesus and said to him, 'Leave this place and go somewhere else. Herod wants to kill you.'

³² He replied, ‘Go and tell that fox, “I will keep on driving out demons and healing people today and tomorrow, and on the third day I will reach my goal.” ³³ In any case, I must press on today and tomorrow and the next day – for surely no prophet can die outside Jerusalem!

³⁴ ‘Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were not willing. ³⁵ Look, your house is left to you desolate. I tell you, you will not see me again until you say, “Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.”’

In times of trouble, sin, fear, doubt or death, Jesus comes to us. We sing, *I looked up...*

Song I Looked Up

Verse 1

I looked up
And I saw my Lord a-coming,
I looked up
And I saw my Lord a-coming down the road.

Chorus

*Alleluia, He is coming,
Alleluia, He is here.
Alleluia, He is coming.
Alleluia, He is here.*

Verse 2

I looked up
And I saw my Lord a-weeping,
I looked up
And I saw my Lord a-weeping for my sins.

Chorus

Verse3

I looked up

And I saw my Lord a-dying,

I looked up

And I saw my Lord a-dying on the cross.

Chorus

Alleluia, He is coming,

Alleluia, He is here.

Alleluia, He is coming.

Alleluia, He is here.

Verse4

I looked up

And I saw my Lord a-rising,

I looked up

And I saw my Lord a-rising from the grave.

Chorus

Lord in a world of suffering and pain, help us to draw strength from your word. Amen.

Sermon

When the going gets tough...

On 3rd February 2022, I was sitting in the small room they call the chapel at Breathing Space - a prayer house in Allesley, near Coventry. Outside the patio doors, my eye was taken by a small bush or tree growing in a pot. It was snuggling in the corner between the patio door and a brick wall, its slender trunk encased in bubble wrap.

It was February and the sun shone in intermittent bursts of bright winter light. As the clouds raced across the sky, they often filtered the sunshine to a range of different intensities. The plant had many leaves and their colour changed with the light, and the hues reflected back to me varied with the angle and curvature of each individual

veined leaf. I guess a typical colour was a lime green, but some could be almost yellow, and some were quite dark, at least for part of the time.

I noticed that each leaf curved upwards from a central vein along its own axis, and then downwards at an angle of 90 degrees to that axis, at its tip. I noticed that the longest branch reached back to the wall, so, I guess, the plant had been rotated to encourage symmetrical growth. Sometimes, when the full sun illuminated the whole plant, it looked like a burst of greenish yellow light, a little burning bush! I also noticed then that some of the yellowish tinges my eye had detected were actually the beginnings of small fruit, waiting to grow and ripen in the coming summer.

Obviously, the attentions of an unseen gardener were apparent. The pot was clearly rotated from time to time to balance out the growth as the plant reached for the light. The trunk was snug in its protective layer. The shrub was protected from the winter wind in a corner of the patio, sheltered by a wall and a patio door. It was winter, but this plant need not fear. Its fruit had every chance of growing. It may be winter, but there is a gardener. This plant will survive because it knows light and shelter and protection.

* * *

Though it is a meteorological spring, we navigate through a kind of emotional winter. Covid still overshadows us, moderating our readiness to engage with life. The devastating war raging in Ukraine saps our spirits. Lies proliferate like spring weeds on social media. Energy prices, already set to rise sharply, look likely to skyrocket in the fallout from sanctions and from warfare. Food prices and the cost of living generally will go up. And none of these, terrible though they may be, are the deadliest crisis. That is climate change - a threat to the viability of humanity. The wintry challenges we face are huge.

* * *

I want to give you a little gift to help get through this emotional winter, however long it lasts. It is the gift of Psalm 27. It falls into four natural sections and each one is important for our wellbeing. I call the sections:
Profession, Posture, Prayer and Poise.

Profession (verses 1 - 3) goes like this:

*1 The Lord is my light and my salvation –
whom shall I fear?*

*The Lord is the stronghold of my life –
of whom shall I be afraid?*

Well that's the profession of faith, the glorious first verse!

*2 When the wicked advance against me
to devour me,
it is my enemies and my foes
who will stumble and fall.*

*3 Though an army besiege me,
my heart will not fear;
though war break out against me,
even then I will be confident.*

This is the **profession** we are invited to make with our lips. The Lord is **my** Light and **my** Salvation and the Stronghold of **my** life. Within the darkest night he kindles a flame that never dies away! Within the coldest winter he builds a fire that ever burns on. We who are called by his name can never be plucked from his hand. We who live in a world of threat and folly need not be afraid for our souls.

So, if you don't know verse 1 yet, I suggest you might learn it. It's a scripture that can carry you through cancer and redundancy, warfare and storm. It's a scripture that can guide you when you're sick, nurse you back to health, or carry you through the ultimate waters of death. As a light flooded my little tree, the Lord's light can flood into your heart and your situation, making you into a kind of burning bush. As a gardener wraps a trunk in bubble wrap, so the Lord wraps your soul in his invincible presence.

Light. Salvation. Stronghold. This is my God! Is he your God too? Make the profession: *the Lord is my light, my salvation, my stronghold... Of whom should I be afraid?*

* * *

Next comes **posture**. After this profession of faith there is an inner attitude we must take. Elsewhere I have spoken of *One Thing Spirituality* and this concept arises right here from section two of Psalm 27, verses 4 - 6. A life may prove exceedingly busy and distracting. A believer needs to adopt such a spiritual posture of devotion that all their life is centred on one thing. I'm not talking about turning people into religious nutcases or making them so heavenly-minded that they're no earthly good. No, I'm talking about a quiet place of devotion within a person's heart around which their whole life makes sense.

*4 One thing I ask from the Lord,
this only do I seek:
that I may dwell in the house of the Lord
all the days of my life,
to gaze on the beauty of the Lord
and to seek him in his temple.*

That right there is the essence of One Thing Spirituality. Verses 5 and 6 develop the idea.

*5 For in the day of trouble
he will keep me safe in his dwelling;
he will hide me in the shelter of his sacred tent
and set me high upon a rock.*

*6 Then my head will be exalted
above the enemies who surround me;
at his sacred tent I will sacrifice with shouts of joy;
I will sing and make music to the Lord.*

Very few people can literally dwell in the house of the Lord all the time - whether that house be a tabernacle or a temple or a synagogue or a church. This *One Thing* posture suggests building one's life around getting just one thing right.

And that One Thing is: to live with a sense of God's presence. This posture is beautifully simple. Don't begin by worrying about anything else - just get this one posture of devotion right - to live deliberately and consciously **in** the presence of the Lord. If you do that, everything else will follow. Seek first his kingdom and everything else will be added...

When we meet a challenge in life, a One Thing posture will keep you safe from the temptation to do evil. It will enable you to pass the tests we were considering last week and reveal the purity of your heart.

Because your heart will be secure, it will follow that in the days of trouble you will be kept safe. This posture is a very lovely thing. In a world of ugliness, it means reserving a place within that is beautiful. The posture of devotion to God becomes a secret place of beauty; the Psalmist longed to gaze on the beauty of the Lord. The trials of life may rise high indeed. You may meet what the world considers grievous losses. But your heart of devotion to the beauty of God remains a guiding light within you.

Some people do choose ugly courses through life. Not you. Your life is centred on the inner reality of a soul that meets with a beautiful God. Even if enemies surround you, you will be able to worship with shouts of joy. You will be able to drown chants of hatred with the loud hymns of praise.

* * *

But. Life is very tough indeed. Sometimes the storms rage so rough that we need a particular habit of prayer to expose our fears and feelings to the healing light of God. This is section three of the Psalm. I call it the Prayer of Experience, verses 7 - 12.

7 Hear my voice when I call, Lord;

be merciful to me and answer me.

8 My heart says of you, 'Seek his face!'

Your face, Lord, I will seek.

9 Do not hide your face from me,

do not turn your servant away in anger;

you have been my helper.

Do not reject me or forsake me,

God my Saviour.

10 Though my father and mother forsake me,

the Lord will receive me.

11 Teach me your way, Lord;

lead me in a straight path

because of my oppressors.

12 Do not hand me over to the desire of my foes,

for false witnesses rise up against me,

spouting malicious accusations.

When the going is very, very tough, we need to develop a toughness, an honesty and a bluntness in prayer. When the going gets tough, the tough get praying. We feed our actual felt experience into our prayer. We feed our prayer back into our daily activity. Give me strength to remain true to that posture of devotion; to live in the reality behind my profession of faith that you are my light, my salvation, my stronghold by song, my life...

The Psalmist shores up his trust by sending arrow prayer after arrow prayer to God. *Hear my voice... Do not hide your face... Do not reject me... Teach me your way... Do not turn me over to the desires of my foes...* If the Profession built **confidence** and the Posture expressed a **spiritual discipline**, now we get a kind of **wrestling Prayer** in which the Psalmist longs for the full sense of God's protection in the lived experience of each day and night.

When life gets muddled and confusing, threatening or worrying, we continue to wrestle God in Prayer of Experience. We keep the lines of communication open. We are honest about our fears and anxieties.

* * *

Profession of faith, posture of devotion and prayer of experience all combine to give our last P: A sense of **Poise**, which we find in verses 13 - 14.

13 I remain confident of this:

I will see the goodness of the Lord

in the land of the living.

14 Wait for the Lord;

be strong and take heart

and wait for the Lord.

The Psalmist is here rooted in the future: I **will** see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living. **Wait** for the Lord - be strong, take heart! This enables him to feel poise. He will not be blown this way and that by the vagaries of life. Like a ship skilfully balanced by its pilot between waves and wind, and choosing its own course, a person shaped by Psalm 27 knows a sense of freedom.

In Ephesians 4, Paul longs for the day when his friends will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of people in their deceitful scheming. He calls for them to be devoted to one another in love. A person of poise, whose sense of peace is rooted in the coming kingdom of God, can experience a stillness which enables them to deliberately choose the right course, even when everyone else is hellbent on doing wrong.

* * *

Now some see this Psalm as a warrior's Psalm... It might have been used at the coronation of a king, and the king might have used it at annual ceremonial commemorations of his anointing, or as a preparation for battle.

Military language peppers the psalm. Stronghold... Advance... Army... Besiege... War... Enemies... Oppressors... Foes...

For many of us, this language might have seemed metaphorical - life is like a war... If this really goes back to King David, then it was literal for him. He was a real fighter.

Can it be literal for Christians defending their homeland from aggressors? Can they profess a conviction of God as light, saviour and stronghold? Can they hold at the centre of their hearts to a posture of devotion, remembering what is good and why they are fighting? Can they pray through their experience, and, in a sense of poise, continue to do what is right?

No-one lives on this earth forever! Our ultimate victory is always the victory over death itself, a victory won by Christ at Easter. And so we can say, come life, come death, come army, come hell or high water - our souls are invincible.

If we are struggling for what is right, then a posture of devotion is not so unthinkable or crazy as it seems. Perhaps noble soldiers can fight with a vision in their heart of the way life should be. Good soldiers, perhaps, have an inviolable space of beauty within them - an inner temple which reminds them of **why** they fight! An image of shared prosperity, of a good land, of children living and growing in security and harmony, of adults making an honest living with hard work, of seniors concluding their lives in peace.

This beautiful vision within them means their spirits can never be crushed. Yes, their bodies may be killed, but their hearts are centred on something that lives forever - Christ's universal kingdom of peace and justice. And for this reason, the good soldier may prevail against the evil soldier, and see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living may yet be seen, though they fight on the battlefields of the earth.

A little girl sings the song from Frozen in a bomb shelter... An 11 year old boy makes a 750 mile journey from Ukraine to Slovakia alone, and finds there a welcome... An elderly Russian citizen makes art for peace, at the cost of her arrest... These are visions of what is right and beautiful that sustain the human spirit. There are uncountably more examples of goodness in the face of hatred.

* * *

So, yes, it's a scary time on planet earth. Scenes in Ukraine have been starkly terrifying and drain our own sense of hope. Even the threat of nuclear war has been raised.

But we owe it to Ukrainian citizens not to let our hearts waver, not to be bowed down by fear, not to lose our commitment to stand for what is right. We serve a Lord who is our light, our salvation and our stronghold. Our souls are invincible, and the cause of right will prevail. Whatever we face in our personal lives or in the world at large, we do not let the world's ugliness defile the beauty we know within.

We follow Jesus, our beautiful saviour, who would not allow himself to be cowed by the murderous threats of the sly fox Herod. We follow Jesus who pressed on to continue his good work, today and tomorrow and the next day... Pressing on to what was right... We follow Jesus, who nurtured a beautiful image of God being like a mother, a mother hen, gathering her chicks under her protective wing... We follow Jesus, who set his face towards Jerusalem, and who knew that on the third day he would reach his goal - meaning God would bring him to the fulfilment of the cross and resurrection. Jesus held true to a beautiful vision of a better world, even when that would lead to the cross. But on the third day, he would rise again, for his beautiful kingdom of justice, peace and mercy has no end. And that is why we sing:

*The Lord is my light and my salvation –
whom shall I fear?*

*The Lord is the stronghold of my life –
of whom shall I be afraid?*

We rise in faith to sing, Guide me O thou great Jehovah...

Hymn (BPW 593) **Guide Me O Thou Great Jehovah**

Guide me, O thou great Jehovah,
pilgrim through this barren land;
I am weak, but thou art mighty;
hold me with thy powerful hand:
bread of heaven, bread of heaven,
feed me now and evermore,
feed me now and evermore.

Open now the crystal fountain,
whence the healing stream doth flow;
let the fiery, cloudy pillar
lead me all my journey through:
strong deliverer, strong deliverer,
be thou still my strength and shield,
be thou still my strength and shield.

When I tread the verge of Jordan,
bid my anxious fears subside:
death of death, and hell's destruction,
land me safe on Canaan's side:
songs of praises, songs of praises
I will ever sing to thee,
I will ever sing to thee.

The Grace

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ;
And the love of God;
And the fellowship of the Holy Spirit
Be with us all, evermore.
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.