

Order of Service 3rd April 2022

Why Not?

Welcome

Hello, and welcome to Hearsall at Home for 3rd April 2022. How good are you at thinking outside the box? Are we open to God speaking in a fresh way? Our service is called simply, *Why not?*

Call to Worship

1 I rejoiced with those who said to me,
‘Let us go to the house of the Lord.’

2 Our feet are standing
in your gates, Jerusalem.

3 Jerusalem is built like a city
that is closely compacted together.

4 That is where the tribes go up –
the tribes of the Lord –
to praise the name of the Lord
according to the statute given to Israel.

Psalm 122: 1 - 4

We sing together that powerful hymn, *Lord of the dance*. And if you feel like moving your feet a little, don't let me stop you!

Song Lord of the Dance

I danced in the morning when the world was begun,
And I danced in the moon and the stars and the sun,
And I came down from heaven and I danced on the earth:
At Bethlehem I had my birth.

Chorus

*Dance, then, wherever you may be,
I am the Lord of the dance, said he,
And I'll lead you all, wherever you may be,
And I'll lead you all in the dance, said he.*

I danced for the scribe and the Pharisee,
But they would not dance, and they wouldn't follow me;
I danced for the fishermen, for James and John;
They came with me, and the dance went on:

Chorus

*Dance, then, wherever you may be,
I am the Lord of the dance, said he,
And I'll lead you all, wherever you may be,
And I'll lead you all in the dance, said he.*

I danced on the Sabbath, and I cured the lame:
The holy people said it was a shame.
They whipped, and they stripped, and they hung me on high,
And they left me there on a cross to die:

Chorus

I danced on a Friday when the sky turned black;
It's hard to dance with the devil on your back.
They buried my body and they thought I'd gone;
But I am the dance, and I still go on:

Chorus

They cut me down and I leapt up high;
I am the life that'll never, never die.
I'll live in you if you'll live in me:
I am the Lord of the dance, said he.

Chorus

*Dance, then, wherever you may be,
I am the Lord of the dance, said he,
And I'll lead you all, wherever you may be,
And I'll lead you all in the dance, said he.*

Prayers of Thanksgiving

Lord, we have so very much to be thankful for:

Our bodies in their beauty and frailty;

Our friends in their fun and honesty;

Our families in their faithfulness and loyalty;

Our church in its fellowship and mission;

Our city in its vibrancy and diversity;

Our countryside bursting into springtime beauty;

Our universe, wondrous beyond our understanding;

Our salvation in Jesus, a gift beyond price.

For all your gifts we give you our thanks.

As we experience so many good things in life, we pray that we will treasure you, the giver, above the gift, and always adore you as our beginning, our end, our all. Amen.

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

Thanks, Lord, for all your gifts to us. Help us to share our gifts with others. Amen.

Our next song also mentions dancing... *Jesus put this song into our hearts.*

Song (WT 239) **Jesus put this Song into our Hearts**

Verse 1

Jesus put this song into our hearts,
Jesus put this song into our hearts.
It's a song of joy no one can take away.
Jesus put this song into our hearts.

Verse 2

Jesus taught us how to live in harmony,
Jesus taught us how to live in harmony.
Different faces, different races, He made us one.
Jesus taught us how to live in harmony.

Verse 3

Jesus taught us how to be a family,
Jesus taught us how to be a family;
Loving one another with love that He gives;
Jesus taught us how to be a family.

Verse 4

Jesus turned our sorrow into dancing,
Jesus turned our sorrow into dancing,
Changed our tears of sadness into rivers of joy;
Jesus turned our sorrow into a dance.

La la la etc.

Let's hear now our first Bible reading from Isaiah.

Bible Reading (International Children's Bible)

Isaiah 43: 16-21

16 This is what the Lord says.

He is the one who made a road through the sea.

Even through rough waters he made a path for his people.

17 He is the one who defeated the chariots and horses.

He defeated the mighty armies.

They fell together, and they will never rise again.

They were destroyed as a flame is put out.

18 The Lord says, "Forget what happened before.

Do not think about the past.

19 Look at the new thing I am going to do.

It is already happening. Don't you see it?

I will make a road in the desert.

I will make rivers in the dry land.

20 Even the wild animals will be thankful to me.

The wild dogs and owls will honour me.

They will honour me when I put water in the desert.

They will honour me when I make rivers in the dry land.

I will do this to give water to my people, the ones I chose.

21 These are the people I made.

And they will sing songs to praise me.

Activity

I wonder what that reading made you imagine? A river in a dry land... Wild animals worshipping God... A worship service in the desert... Flowers blooming by an oasis. Why not have a go at drawing something inspired by Isaiah's great vision?

We share now our prayers of concern for the world at large.

Prayers of Intercession – in the form of a meditation

Think for a moment of a stream bouncing down the mountainside, clear, fresh, and playful. It sparkles in the sun. Nothing can hold back its enthusiasm. Let that be a picture of how we feel about the good and joyful things in our life - the people, the events, the daily miracles of nature, the details of seeing and breathing and touching. Let's remember when our spirits rose this week, when life felt pure and true. As the stream enjoys its very nature, let's enjoy the memory of those good things – and in silence, be thankful.

The stream bounces on, full of itself, full of potential, but inevitably it runs into obstacles – boulders and fallen branches and the accumulation of debris. We too run into obstacles that fall across our path, debris from our mistakes, boulders that

seem too hard to shift. So, we name those obstacles now, being honest with our hearts. But we also watch the stream. It may not be able to force its way through the problems, but it's endlessly inventive in finding another way – around, or beneath, or above. The love of God is inexhaustible and irresistible. Let's see that love carrying us over or under or around whatever obstacles are set before us today.

The stream is bolder now, fuller, more sure of itself. It's joined by other streams that have made their own journeys and brought their own character as a gift to others. Who has God given each of us as a gift? Who brings grace into our life? Who has brought us the greatest gift of all – the love of God in a form we can understand? We give thanks for these people who have come into our lives, and pray for them, that they may continue to radiate the presence of Christ.

These last few weeks our thoughts have been dominated by the atrocities of war in Ukraine. A war that is unjust and cruel, so we pray for that nation, that peace will come and come soon. Father, you have moved people's hearts to do whatever they can to help by sending aid in many different ways. We pray also for the people of Russia where truth is not shared or heard.

Lord of boundless energy, you refuse to be beaten, always you reinvent yourself to achieve the impossible. Give us such confidence in your life running through the world, that nothing will stop you achieving your joyous purposes of love, life, hope and justice. This we ask in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen

It's easy to get held back by rules, resources, traditions and the like. Let's open our minds by singing, *Come with me, come wander...*

Song (BPW 333) **Come with Me Come Wander**

Come with me, come wonder, come welcome the world
Where strangers might smile or where stones may be hurled;
Come leave what you cling to, lay down what you clutch
And find, with hands empty, that hearts can hold much.

Chorus

Sing hey for the carpenter leaving his tools!
Sing hey for the Pharisees leaving their rules!
Sing hey for the fishermen leaving their nets!
Sing hey for the people who leave their regrets!

Come walk in my company, come sleep by my side,
Come savour a lifestyle with nothing to hide;
Come sit at my table and eat with my friends,
Discovering that love which the world never ends.

Chorus

Sing hey for the carpenter leaving his tools!
Sing hey for the Pharisees leaving their rules!
Sing hey for the fishermen leaving their nets!
Sing hey for the people who leave their regrets!

Come share in my laughter, come close to my fears,
Come find yourself washed with the kiss of my tears;
Come stand close at hand while I suffer and die
And find in three days how I never will lie.

Chorus

Come leave your possessions, come share out your treasure,
Come give and receive without method or measure;
Come loose every bond that's resisting the Spirit,
Enabling the Earth to be yours to inherit.

Chorus

We hear a second reading now from John's gospel.

Bible Reading (International Children's Bible)

John 12: 1-8

12 Six days before the Passover Feast, Jesus went to Bethany, where Lazarus lived. (Lazarus is the man Jesus raised from death.) 2 There they had a dinner for Jesus. Martha served the food. Lazarus was one of the people eating with Jesus. 3 Mary brought in a pint of very expensive perfume made from pure nard. She poured the perfume on Jesus' feet, and then she wiped his feet with her hair. And the sweet smell from the perfume filled the whole house.

4 Judas Iscariot, one of Jesus' followers, was there. (He was the one who would later turn against Jesus.) Judas said, 5 "This perfume was worth an entire year's wages. It

should have been sold and the money given to the poor.”⁶ But Judas did not really care about the poor. He said this because he was a thief. He was the one who kept the money box, and he often stole money from it.

⁷ Jesus answered, “Let her alone. It was right for her to save this perfume for today—the day for me to be prepared for burial. ⁸ The poor will always be with you, but you will not always have me.”

Talk

Why Not?

Six days before the end of Jesus’ life, I suppose Judas knew what he knew...

He knew Jesus wasn’t about to drive out the occupying army of the Romans. All Jesus’ brilliantly original talking was leading inevitably to his own dying.

Judas knew the price of olive oil, and barley flour... and perfume for that matter. And he knew that lots of poor ordinary folk could do with some practical help.

He knew how to handle money and act as treasurer for Jesus’ wandering band of vagabond disciples. He knew the value of his own time and that he deserved a small percentage of the turnover. He knew what money could buy. He knew what cash value an asset could raise.

Oh yes, Judas knew a thing or two, and he knew that he knew it.

So, let’s imagine him smelling the perfume filling the whole house at a dinner party with Jesus. It takes place at the home of Jesus’ intimate friends Martha, Mary and, back-from-the-dead, Lazarus.

Rich, pungent, overpowering, opulent fragrance... Imagine your own reactions to the moment: puzzlement, irritation, wonder?

But what does Judas smell? He smells waste. He does a calculation... This is what, twenty grand’s worth of rare scent blown in a single evening. And, for what? He blurts out his assessment: this could have been sold and the money could have funded poverty relief, though the narrator tells us he is insincere and was more concerned with getting his own cut of the proceeds.

Poor Judas. What he already knew prevented him from knowing more. How does the old saying go? He knew the cost of everything and the value of nothing. Jesus doesn't fit well in an accountant's spreadsheet.

Jesus explains to anyone with ears to hear: *It was right for [Mary] to save this perfume for today—the day for me to be prepared for burial.* This is a sacred moment.

On the coming Friday, God's Son will hang shamed on a cross, dying in agony. The heady fragrance of this perfume is a consecration of Jesus' coming suffering. The value of the coming Friday could not be measured in shekels or pounds. The steadfast love of God pierced through even the thick darkness of human folly, wickedness, suffering and death. The sombre Friday to come would be a Good Friday.

Judas couldn't see it. He couldn't even smell it. The way he knew what he already knew stopped him from knowing more.

* * *

The prophet in Isaiah says:

The Lord says, "Forget what happened before.

Do not think about the past.

Look at the new thing I am going to do.

It is already happening. Don't you see it?"

We picture exiles in Babylon poised to return to their homeland. They know their ancestral story so well: the Exodus. God brought the children of Israel out of slavery and into the promised land. He made the road through the sea and drowned the armies of the pursuing slave-masters.

So, centuries later, in Babylon, does the prophet really want them to forget their great national story? Well, of course not; he's just reminded them of it! When he says, **forget it**, he means don't let the way that things happened centuries ago blot out the new thing I am doing today. It's possible to know something in such a way that we are closed to anything new. But it's also possible to know what we know but still be open to the new.

More majestic than the Exodus tale, the prophet imagines the desert itself transformed into an irrigated garden, with wildlife thriving and people worshipping in what had once been a wilderness. But if you had no more room in your head than the story you already knew, well, you couldn't see the new story that God was wanting to bring about.

* * *

Can it be that in our own life we accumulate so much knowledge that we cannot know anything new? If we feel **dissatisfaction** with the way things are in our life, can we actually welcome that dissatisfaction, and see it almost as an oracle from a prophet within our own soul?

In recent years I've enjoyed a couple of Picaresque novels. As you may know, a Picaresque novel is a story centred on an ordinary person who drops out of regular life and pursues their own humorous adventure on their own terms. *Don Quixote* is the classic novel of this genre.

One of my favourites, *Monsignor Quixote* by Graham Greene, is inspired by the Don Quixote story. In Greene's take, a Spanish priest and a communist mayor go on a road trip together. The story brilliantly helps the reader to see that the Catholic and the Communist actually have a lot in common and in some deep way are aiming for overlapping goals in life. But to see that, they have to drop out and look under the façade of the regular life that constrains them.

The desire to drop out might seem alarming to ourselves, our family and friends, but we need to understand it. To see it played out in fiction can help us to reflect on the nature of our own dissatisfaction.

My other favourite Picaresque novel is called *The Year of the Hare*, by Finnish writer Arto Paasilinna. In that story, a journalist spots a hare on the side of a road through a forest, immediately leaves his companion to drive off without him, bonds with the hare, drops out of society with all its norms, expectations and laws and goes on an adventure.

Through his eyes, and almost through the eyes of the hare, we see human society for what it is. At one point, the hero, Vatanen and his hare wander into a country church.

The pastor comes in and starts fussing with candles and papers, getting the church ready for a service. After a while, he spots the hare and immediately chases it round to catch this wild beast, which he sees as an unwelcome intruder into his churchy world.

But he's an old man, and he can't catch the beast! He grows desperate to be rid of it and loses his grip on reality. He hurries to his nearby parsonage and comes back with an old pistol he's had since his army days in 1917. He runs around the church trying to shoot the terrified hare. A stray bullet pierces a sacred painting of Christ in his knee. Feeling overcome with remorse at this sacrilege, the pastor accidentally shoots his own foot!

The hare finds his master, Vatanen, who has been hiding in a pew. The pastor needs help - he has a bleeding foot and the town clerk's daughter is about to come and get married in the church. Our hero, Vatanen, bandages up the pastor's foot, swaps over the insoles in his shoes to absorb more blood, collects up the bullet cartridges and tries to waft the smell of cordite out of the church. Somehow the pastor manages to conduct the wedding with skill, ignoring the pain in his foot.

The Year of the Hare is not a parody of religion. Rather, it questions all of human life. What wildness is masked by human culture? Under the façade of all the numerous things we routinely do, what is it all about?

* * *

So now where have we got to? Three things:

1. What we already know can prevent us from knowing something new.
2. It's possible to know the price of everything but miss the true value of what really matters.
3. Dissatisfaction with the way things are can help us to hold to what we know more tightly - assuming we can resist the urge to just drop out of life!

All these things are actually reflections of the mysterious nature of God. God cannot be reduced to the rituals of a church in rural Finland, or the liturgy of the Anglicans or the doctrines of the Baptists or the traditions of the Sikhs. Our dissatisfaction can point us to the reality of God. God is not this religion or that religion. God simply IS.

As I've sometimes said, I am not convinced that Jesus ever intended to set up a new religion. I think he was showing us a way of living. He was dissatisfied with the religious culture of his day. If he dropped **out** of religious culture, he also dropped **in** - into the underlying reality of God.

So be careful with the way you know what you already know. Don't let your knowledge make you deaf to new voices. Listen to your dissatisfaction and let it point the way to a more authentic way of living. Ponder the value of what deeply matters under the frothy foam of all human culture.

What's the value of a little church community in Coventry? Very little on a balance sheet, and yet what we experience here, through one another, is infinitely precious. Local churches like ours are the hope of the world.

So why not... Why not dream dreams of something very different beyond what I've called the foamy froth of human culture? Thinking about a little local church, thinking about your personal life, thinking about the world, complete the sentence, Why not...?

For example:

Why not make hospitality central to church life? Why not run Bible study in Costa coffee? Why not do church with other churches and see what we can learn together? Why not support religious friends with Diwali or Ramadan? Why not imagine a church with a new building or no building at all? Why not put up a sign saying we welcome LGBTQ+ people? Why not aim for a gold award as an eco church? Why not bring our dogs to worship? Why not sometimes have a service without any songs or hymns? Why not replace the sermon sometimes with discussion groups? Why not learn what really matters to us as followers of Jesus with everyone doing a course together?

Why not join the beautiful community of deacons and show us a fresh way of serving church? Why not read Don Quixote? Why not learn to play the electric guitar? Why not change the things you always do and try something completely different? Why not join the walk every Thursday in the park - or just bring a picnic and chat if the walk is too much? Why not invite your friend to church?

Why not join the People's Climate Coalition in Coventry and work for sustainable living in our city? Why not get a bit fitter, reach out to an old friend, invite your neighbours in for coffee, join a life drawing class, start writing poems, buy a new bike, tell your sister you love her, pray for peace, take in a refugee, hire a singing coach, start wearing purple, learn how to build a website, do weight training, write real letters, learn Italian, do something wildly extravagant for a person you love...?

Of course, there are thousands of answers to my literal question, Why not? Many of these answers need to be weighed up at some point. But my message today is simple: Don't start with the reasons why not. Start with the potential. Think outside the boxes of religion and Britishness. In that sense:

Forget what happened before.

Do not think about the past.

Look at the new thing I am going to do.

It is already happening. Don't you see it?

Where's your pint of pure nard? Is it time to crack it open?

Our closing song suggests ways of being open and creative in our gospel sharing...

Hymn (BPW 568) **Colours of Day**

Colours of day dawn into the mind,
The sun has come up, the night is behind.
Go down in the city, into the street,
And let's give the message to the people we meet.

Chorus

*So light up the fire and let the flame burn,
Open the door, let Jesus return.
Take seeds of His Spirit, let the fruit grow,
Tell the people of Jesus, let His love show.*

Go through the park, on into the town;
The sun still shines on, it never goes down.
The light of the world is risen again;
The people of darkness are needing a friend.

Chorus

*So light up the fire and let the flame burn,
Open the door, let Jesus return.
Take seeds of His Spirit, let the fruit grow,
Tell the people of Jesus, let His love show.*

Open your eyes, look into the sky,
The darkness has come, the Son came to die.
The evening draws on, the sun disappears,
But Jesus is living, His Spirit is near.

Chorus x2

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.