

Order of Service 1st May 2022

Turn! Turn! Turn!

Welcome

Hello, and welcome to Hearsall at Home for 1st May 2022. Our service today is called Turn, turn, turn - and we consider the lifelong process of turning to Christ.

Call to Worship

Then I looked and heard the voice of many angels, numbering thousands upon thousands, and ten thousand times ten thousand. They encircled the throne and the living creatures and the elders. ¹² In a loud voice they were saying:

'Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain,
to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength
and honour and glory and praise!'

¹³ Then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all that is in them, saying:

'To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb
be praise and honour and glory and power,
for ever and ever!'

¹⁴ The four living creatures said, 'Amen', and the elders fell down and worshipped.

Revelation 5: 11 - 14

Let us turn to the Lord, our vision, wisdom, protection, wealth and joy as we sing, *Be thou my vision...*

Hymn (BPW 521) **Be Thou my Vision, O Lord of my Heart**

Be thou my vision, O Lord of my heart;
Be all else but nothing, except what thou art;
Be thou my best thought in the day and the night,
Both waking and sleeping, thy presence my light.

Be thou my wisdom, be thou my true word;
Be thou ever with me, and I with thee, Lord;
Be thou my great Father, and I thy true son;
Be thou in me dwelling, and I with thee one.

Be thou my breastplate, my sword for the fight;
Be thou my whole armour, be thou my true might;
Be thou my soul's shelter, be thou my strong tower;
O raise thou me heavenward, great power of my power.

Be thou my true riches, not man's empty praise;
Be thou mine inheritance, now and always;
Be thou and thou only the first in my heart;
O Sovereign of heaven, my treasure thou art.

High King of heaven, thou heaven's bright sun,
O grant me its joys, after victory is won;
Great heart of my own heart, whatever befall,
Still be thou my vision, O Ruler of all.

Opening prayer (Eric Milner-White, 1884-1963)

Jesus, Creator,
Recreate and renew me.
Jesu, Saviour,
Save me from sin, Save me from self.

Jesu, High Priest,
Pity me,
Plead for me,
Pardon and purify me.

Jesu, Prophet,
Waken and warn me.

Jesu, King,
Rule me.
Jesu, the Way,

Jesu, my friend,
Go with me always.

Jesu, the Truth,
Teach me and counsel me,
Make me all true.

Jesu, true Light,
Scatter my darkness.

Jesu, true Bread,
Strengthen my weakness.

Jesu, good Shepherd,
Lead me and feed me.

Jesu, the Life,
Live in me always,
that I may adore thee,
my Lord and my God,
evermore.

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

Breath and life and home and warmth and family and friends,
we receive from your hand.

Receive our own gifts to church and foodbank
as tokens of the offerings of our lives. Amen.

We sing a couple of worship songs together, praising our wonderful Lord.

2 Songs: (WT 349) **Praise him on the Trumpet** (WT 65) **Come on and Celebrate**

Praise Him on the trumpet,
The psaltery and harp.
Praise Him on the timbrel
And the dance.
Praise Him with stringed instruments too.
Praise Him on the loud cymbals,
Praise Him on the loud cymbals.
Let everything that has breath
Praise the Lord!

Chorus

*Hallelujah, praise the Lord,
Hallelujah, praise the Lord;
Let everything that has breath
Praise the Lord!*

(Repeat from the beginning)

Song (WT 65) **Come on and Celebrate**

Come on and celebrate
His gift of love, we will celebrate
The Son of God who loved us
And gave us life.
We'll shout Your praise, O King,
You give us joy nothing else can bring,
We'll give to You our offering
In celebration praise.

Come on and celebrate, celebrate,
Celebrate and sing,
Celebrate and sing to our King.
Come on and celebrate, celebrate,
Celebrate and sing,
Celebrate and sing to our King.

Our prayers of intercession today are led by Peter Fearn.

Prayers of Intercession

As children of God, let us pray to Him as one body.

Loving Heavenly Father,

After over two months of human suffering in Ukraine, we pray for the situation there and the effects on the people which have been brought about by this war.

For all those caught up in the day-to-day horrors of conflict. For those who cannot, or will not, leave Ukraine; that they are not discouraged by those who do, and not feel that the international community has given up hope for the possibility of peace. For those fleeing we pray for their safe passage, for welcoming arms, shelter and food. We pray that international leaders will know the guidance and wisdom of the Holy Spirit and that peace may reign in that area, and throughout the world.

Lord, bless our homes and families with the joy of your presence. May our homes be ever open to you and your love. We pray for all who struggle with chronic illness and pain, for those who are lonely and for those who mourn. Bring comfort to all in need and we raise to you those from our own fellowship including Tina Pettifer, Val Taylor, Sarah Lewis, Chris Adamson and Aura Roman. In our own thoughts we think of those who need to feel your closeness. We pray for all carers and those who visit and comfort the sick, for those who listen and for those who pray. Protect all those we love from harm.

Lord, we bring before you all international heads of government, our own national leaders and all those who will be raised to office in the forthcoming local council elections. May they be thoughtful and wise in their decisions, may they have integrity, and also be open to your guidance. May we all play our part in the welfare

of this community in your name.

Father God, we pray for our Church, for our Minister and Trustees, and that each of us might make use of our individual talents, enabling us to flourish as a witness to the "One Body" of the church. Help us all to appreciate the gifts and roles of each other. Help us to spread the warmth of Your love to everyone we meet, and also to welcome all who come here, no matter what their background or outlook on life. Loving God, please hear our prayers. Amen

Many thanks Peter for those prayers. And we hear our Bible readings now from Acts and from John.

Readings

Acts 9: 1 - 20

Saul's conversion

9 Meanwhile, Saul was still breathing out murderous threats against the Lord's disciples. He went to the high priest ² and asked him for letters to the synagogues in Damascus, so that if he found any there who belonged to the Way, whether men or women, he might take them as prisoners to Jerusalem. ³ As he neared Damascus on his journey, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. ⁴ He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, 'Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?'

⁵ 'Who are you, Lord?' Saul asked.

'I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting,' he replied. ⁶ 'Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do.'

⁷ The men travelling with Saul stood there speechless; they heard the sound but did not see anyone. ⁸ Saul got up from the ground, but when he opened his eyes he could see nothing. So they led him by the hand into Damascus. ⁹ For three days he was blind, and did not eat or drink anything.

¹⁰ In Damascus there was a disciple named Ananias. The Lord called to him in a vision, 'Ananias!'

'Yes, Lord,' he answered.

¹¹ The Lord told him, 'Go to the house of Judas on Straight Street and ask for a man from Tarsus named Saul, for he is praying. ¹² In a vision he has seen a man named Ananias come and place his hands on him to restore his sight.'

¹³ 'Lord,' Ananias answered, 'I have heard many reports about this man and all the harm he has done to your holy people in Jerusalem. ¹⁴ And he has come here with authority from the chief priests to arrest all who call on your name.'

¹⁵ But the Lord said to Ananias, 'Go! This man is my chosen instrument to proclaim my name to the Gentiles and their kings and to the people of Israel. ¹⁶ I will show him how much he must suffer for my name.'

¹⁷ Then Ananias went to the house and entered it. Placing his hands on Saul, he said, 'Brother Saul, the Lord – Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you were coming here – has sent me so that you may see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit.' ¹⁸ Immediately, something like scales fell from Saul's eyes, and he could see again. He got up and was baptised, ¹⁹ and after taking some food, he regained his strength.

Saul in Damascus and Jerusalem

Saul spent several days with the disciples in Damascus. ²⁰ At once he began to preach in the synagogues that Jesus is the Son of God.

John 21: 1 - 19

Jesus and the miraculous catch of fish

21 Afterwards Jesus appeared again to his disciples, by the Sea of Galilee.^[a] It happened this way: ² Simon Peter, Thomas (also known as Didymus^[b]), Nathanael from Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two other disciples were together. ³ 'I'm going out to fish,' Simon Peter told them, and they said, 'We'll go with you.' So they went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing.

⁴ Early in the morning, Jesus stood on the shore, but the disciples did not realise that it was Jesus.

⁵ He called out to them, 'Friends, haven't you any fish?'

'No,' they answered.

⁶ He said, 'Throw your net on the right side of the boat and you will find some.' When they did, they were unable to haul the net in because of the large number of fish.

⁷ Then the disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, 'It is the Lord!' As soon as Simon Peter heard him say, 'It is the Lord,' he wrapped his outer garment round him (for he had taken it off) and jumped into the water. ⁸ The other disciples followed in the boat, towing the net full of fish, for they were not far from shore, about a hundred metres. ⁹ When they landed, they saw a fire of burning coals there with fish on it, and some bread.

¹⁰ Jesus said to them, 'Bring some of the fish you have just caught.' ¹¹ So Simon Peter climbed back into the boat and dragged the net ashore. It was full of large fish, 153, but even with so many the net was not torn. ¹² Jesus said to them, 'Come and have breakfast.' None of the disciples dared ask him, 'Who are you?' They knew it was the Lord. ¹³ Jesus came, took the bread and gave it to them, and did the same with the fish. ¹⁴ This was now the third time Jesus appeared to his disciples after he was raised from the dead.

Jesus reinstates Peter

¹⁵ When they had finished eating, Jesus said to Simon Peter, 'Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?'

'Yes, Lord,' he said, 'you know that I love you.'

Jesus said, 'Feed my lambs.'

¹⁶ Again Jesus said, 'Simon, son of John, do you love me?'

He answered, 'Yes, Lord, you know that I love you.'

Jesus said, 'Take care of my sheep.'

¹⁷ The third time he said to him, 'Simon, son of John, do you love me?'

Peter was hurt because Jesus asked him the third time, 'Do you love me?' He said, 'Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you.'

Jesus said, 'Feed my sheep. ¹⁸ Very truly I tell you, when you were younger you dressed yourself and went where you wanted; but when you are old you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will dress you and lead you where you do not

want to go.' ¹⁹ Jesus said this to indicate the kind of death by which Peter would glorify God. Then he said to him, 'Follow me!'

Let's turn to the God whose love holds us through all of life as we sing, O love that will not let me go...

Hymn (BPW 541) **O love that will not let me go**

O love that will not let me go,
I rest my weary soul in thee;
I give thee back the life I owe,
That in thine ocean depths its flow
May richer, fuller be.

O light that follows all my way,
I yield my flickering torch to thee;
My heart restores its borrowed ray,
That in thy sunshine's blaze its day
May brighter, fairer be.

O joy that seeks for me through pain,
I cannot close my heart to thee;
I trace the rainbow through the rain,
And feel the promise is not vain
That morn shall tearless be.

O cross that raises up my head,
I dare not ask to fly from thee;
I lay in dust life's glory dead,
And from the ground there blossoms red
Life that shall endless be.

Sermon

Turn! Turn! Turn!

Be nice to me. God hasn't finished with me yet!

Most of us are happy to admit we are a work in progress. Nobody's perfect. And, as the old saying goes, if you find a perfect church, don't join it, because if you did it wouldn't be perfect anymore.

But we have two quick conversion stories today. Our readings are stylised tales of a pair of foundational characters whose lives were very rapidly transformed after encounters with the risen Jesus. The narratives in John and in Acts depict conversion as a one-off, all-or-nothing experience.

They had been in darkness; now they were in the light.

They had been lost; now they were found.

If **you** were to tell your conversion story, my guess is it would be less dramatic and more subtle. Maybe something like this: *I went to church as a child and always sort of quietly believed in God, but it was only when I returned to church later in life that it began to make a bit more sense.* Such accounts might be less compelling, but they are more authentic. Of course, Luke and John were writing of the times when a new faith was born; we experience Christ in Britain today in the context of many centuries of European Christian tradition.

That makes conversion both easier and harder. It's easier, because the building blocks of Christian tradition are laying all around us in a country filled with churches and priests and cathedrals and candles and memories of the saying of the Lord's prayer at school, and a Christian monarch, and Baptist Sunday schools, and songs recalled from childhood, and classic hymns played on old organs in country churches and the harvest being gathered in to the glory of God... To live in the home of the Wesleys, of Thomas Cranmer and John Bunyan and Charles Spurgeon and of hundreds of heroes and heroines of Christian faith... This all must make conversion less of a stretch.

But it also makes conversion harder. With such ancient folk, memories of Christianity being so strong, and with numerous versions of Christianity in its various denominations, movements and ideologies, well, sometimes we can't see the wood for the trees.

Paul, previously known as Saul, had such a clear-cut transformation, didn't he? His was a stunningly dramatic experience that was the defining event of his life. On route to Damascus to arrest followers of Jesus and bring them back to Jerusalem for trial, he himself is arrested by a flash of a blinding light and a voice in the air. Paul meets Jesus back from the dead - and hears that in persecuting Jesus' followers, he was persecuting Jesus himself! He's blinded for three days, fasts and prays and thinks, and converts from being a persecutor of the Jesus-people into their principal advocate. He is baptised and goes about preaching Jesus in the synagogues. His life had turned round in a week or so.

Peter's is a speedy tale too. He'd gone back to fishing. The dream of Jesus' kingdom was over. He had denied Jesus three times in his hour of need. He was unworthy of the name of Christ. But after a night without a single catch, fishermen friends see a figure on the shoreline in the dawn. He tells them to cast the net on the other side. They take a huge catch and John says, *It is the Lord*. Peter dives into the water and swims to shore. Jesus has been cooking breakfast. After the meal comes the conversation with Jesus.

Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?

'Than these what?', we might ask. These fish? The fishing tackle? His fellow disciples? Does he love them more than he loves Jesus? Or does he love Jesus more than they love Jesus? We can't be sure, but Peter answers:

Yes Lord, you know I love you.

Jesus says: *Feed my lambs.*

Presumably the lambs are the new Christians, the new sheep of the Lord's flock.

But Jesus asks a second time: *Do you love me?*

Yes Lord, you know I love you, agrees Peter.

A similar reply from Jesus: *Take care of my sheep.*

Presumably Peter is being told to look after the fledgling church. To love the flock.

And a third time Jesus asks: *Do you love me?*

Peter feels hurt at Jesus' need to ask a third time. We might remember Peter's three denials, now eclipsed by three affirmations of love. So Peter says:

You know all things: you know that I love you.

Feed my sheep.

So, is Peter converted by an ideology? By a religion? By a church tradition? No, he is converted by love. Love Jesus and prove it by loving his followers too - feeding his lambs and taking care of his sheep.

Peter is not affirming the theology of the Trinity, the doctrine of original sin, still less the foundation of the church of Rome or the power-hungry nature of Christendom, or the convictions of the early Baptists. He is quite simply converted by love and for love.

When I think of his fellow apostle, Paul, aka Saul, and when I read of how he writes of his own conversion experience in his letter to the Philippians, it seems to me that that experience bears comparison with falling in love. On that Damascus road he meets a risen Jesus who says, *Why do you persecute me?* He meets Jesus who identifies so deeply with his followers that he takes their suffering personally. Paul is quickly turned round by the experience. Paul is quickly turned round by the experience.

Later he spills a lot of ink in working out what it all meant for the future of the world; he works out his brilliant theology. But, at the start, his, too, was a conversion by the stunning love of Jesus for his people, and for him, and so that he might become a beneficiary and an expression of that same astonishing divine love. This love had been proved as the ultimate force of the universe, for it had even broken the bonds of death.

I suppose that, in reality, both Peter and Paul were also works in progress. You can trace a falling out between them in the pages of the New Testament. God still had work to do for them in completing their conversion. Yet their dramatic stories make it seem so simple.

So what about you? Do you echo my opening words: *Be nice to me. God hasn't finished with me yet!* Are you, too, a work in progress?

Last week I was encouraging us to see beyond small churchy concerns and to the heart of what really mattered - belonging to the community of forgiveness founded by Jesus.

But that doesn't mean simply that anything goes... Peter was called to love Jesus and care for his people. We can feel a similar call. Our Christian faith lies in loving Jesus and in caring for one another.

In caring for one another, it's so important that we understand what matters to each other, and why.

In the novel *To Kill a Mockingbird*, the hero Atticus Finch counsels his young daughter Scout.

If you can learn a simple trick, Scout, you'll get along a lot better with all kinds of folks. You never really understand a person until you consider things from his point of view, until you climb inside of his skin and walk around in it.

Or, as Marcus Aurelius put it:

Whenever you are about to find fault with someone, ask yourself the following question: What fault of mine most nearly resembles the one I am about to criticise?

So, here's the thing: Yes, we need not get hung up on smaller issues that mystify the world beyond the church. But we bear with one another, and we love one another.

Let me share a really simple example or two.

My late wife Ruth had a pan for boiling eggs. She'd had it since before we met, and it got a bit ropey over the years. I began to get a little worried about it because the handle came loose.

Eventually the handle dropped off altogether. I was thinking, how silly this was. She would boil eggs in a pan without a handle, using an oven glove to tip off the boiling water.

We could afford a new pan! Eventually, well into our fifties, we found another pan in a second-hand shop - Ruth was always quite thrifty. At last, I took the old pan and put it in the garage ready for our next trip to the tip. It was only then that Ruth told me that her Uncle John and Aunty Muriel had bought her that pan when she first left home to study nursing in Leeds. I felt terrible, but at last I understood. This pan was not just a pan - it was a symbol of the loving care of a favourite aunt and uncle.

I have my own foibles, of course. When I asked Ruth to marry me, we arranged a visit to her parents in Doncaster to seek their approval. Mrs Frankish had made a very nice roast dinner.

Over this main course I talked through our intentions and the occasion was going so well until my future mother-in-law brought in the dessert. Now many of you know my least favourite dessert is bread and butter pudding. I am a very faddy eater and there are other desserts that also turn my stomach a bit. And, so it was, that, though she thought she was bringing me a treat, I was horrified to see a lemon meringue pie.

My behaviour was positively rude, I suppose. I just said, no thank you; I didn't like it. I later discovered it was her signature dessert! How could I have behaved in such a crass way? You had to get inside my skin in order to understand that.

Well once, as a little boy, I didn't really fancy the pudding at the school dinner. We had a fierce head teacher in our little school in Peterborough. We were all terrified of him.

He was famous for using the cane. He would take boys into his study and taunt them with his weapon... *Shall I? Shall I?* he would threaten, brandishing the cane in a frightening manner.

Back to the lemon meringue pie. I was forced to eat it even though I didn't want it, and I was afraid that if I didn't comply, I might be walloped. As a result, I've disliked it ever since. So, I didn't eat Ruth's mum's pie, but, fortunately for me, I still got the girl!

We can look at what matters to someone or at some aspect of their behaviour and write them off as awkward or small-minded or capricious or silly... But to care for one another and to love one another is to listen to each other and to take the trouble to find out what the world looks like through someone else's eyes. What might seem

insignificant to one may be precious to another. What may seem a broken old pan to one, might be a token of a beloved relative to another.

Maybe one day, God will teach me how to enjoy lemon meringue pie or even bread and butter pudding, which I dislike even more. In the meantime, please be patient with me. God hasn't finished with me yet.

Of course, I'm giving trivial examples, and in no way want to equate whatever concerns you may have about church life with such small matters. My point is this, the simple love ethic at the heart of the church community means we must listen to each other and understand each other.

Since, for most of us, conversion is a life-time process, we need to keep on turning and turning and turning back to Christ, back to love. To love is not to dismiss someone else's concern, but to do our best to understand it.

Jesus' closing words to Peter indicate the way that God will complete his work in his apostle. *When you are old you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will dress you and lead you where you do not want to go.* Peter would follow his Master even to the cross.

Every day we turn to love. Every moment we breathe the love of Christ into our hearts. In every situation, we are invited to choose love - to see each situation as an ambassador, declaring the will of God for us to love, to understand, to give. As we grow in maturity and complete our conversion process, that is a kind of dying - a dying to our superficial demands, a dying to our overblown egos, a dying to our need to get our way.

Every day we turn and turn and turn to love. Don't just take this as a poetic thought. Ponder it. Think it through. Pray about it. You are loved with a love that endures forever and holds on to you through all your failures, successes, disappointments, joys, goodness and badness whether you're right or whether you're wrong. That love is simply there for you, That's the nature of God.

Our job is to turn and turn and turn again and again to this love. *Be nice to me. God hasn't finished with me yet!*

So, in closing we turn to Christ and offer him our lives and consecrate ourselves to him. *Take my life and let it be...*

Hymn (BPW 358) **Take my Life, and let it be**

Take my life, and let it be
Consecrated, Lord, to Thee;
Take my moments and my days,
Let them flow in ceaseless praise.

Take my hands, and let them move
At the impulse of Thy love;
Take my feet, and let them be
Swift and beautiful for Thee.

Take my voice, and let me sing
Always, only, for my King;
Take my lips, and let them be
Filled with messages from Thee.

Take my silver and my gold,
All by Thee to be controlled;
Take my intellect, and use
Every power as Thou shalt choose.

Take my will and make it Thine;
It shall be no longer mine.
Take my heart - it is Thine own;
It shall be Thy royal throne.

Take my love, my Lord, I pour
At Thy feet its treasure-store;
Take myself, and I will be,
Ever, only, all for 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.