

Order of Service for 10th July 2022

Deal or No Deal?

Welcome

Hello everyone and welcome to Hearsall at Home for 10th July 2022.

Call to Worship

Psalm 100:1 declares: *Shout for joy to the Lord, all the earth.* We come to worship our great God, and sing a setting of the rest of this Psalm...

Hymn (BPW 2) **All People that on Earth do Dwell**

All people that on earth do dwell,
sing to the Lord with cheerful voice;
him serve with mirth, his praise forth tell;
come now before him and rejoice.

Know that the Lord is God indeed;
without our aid he did us make;
we are his folk, he will us feed,
and for his sheep he does us take.

O enter then his gates with praise,
approach with joy his courts unto;
praise him and bless his name always,
for it is seemly so to do.

Because the Lord our God is good;
his mercy is for ever sure;
his truth at all times firmly stood,
and shall from age to age endure.

Prayers

Heavenly Father, in our best selves, we do indeed love to come before you with joyful songs, praising you for all you have made. But sometimes we get muddled and

our feelings can be hard to understand. If that's us today, please help us to discern your call upon us again, and to understand ourselves more correctly.

Sometimes we have wandered from the path of truth and are no longer living as Jesus taught. We confess that we are sinners, and we think, speak and act in ways of which we are ashamed. Forgive us for all our sins, for the sake of Jesus, and fill us again with your Holy Spirit as we once more walk along the path of life.

And now we praise you once more - for the blessing of being alive; for our friends and families and faith; for those who care for us in our day to-day-lives - including dentists, doctors, nurses, police officers and many more; for the great beauty of the natural world; for Jesus our teacher, guide, Saviour and Lord; for your Holy Spirit's presence in our lives; for your church across space and time. Accept our praises, Lord, and make us living sacrifices to you. 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, we delight to bring our humble gifts as small tokens of our worship. Take all the gifts we share and let them speak of your amazing grace and steadfast love. Amen.

We sing two worship songs in celebration of Jesus' saving love.

Songs (WT 82) **Far and Near** and (WT 237) **Jesus, Jesus, Jesus**

Verse 1

Far and near hear the call,
Worship Him Lord of all.
Families of nations come
Celebrate what God has done.

Chorus

*Say it loud, say it strong!
Tell the world what God has done.
Say it loud, praise His name,
Let the earth rejoice, the Lord reigns!*

Verse 2

Deep and wide is the love
Heaven sent from above.
God's own Son for sinners died,
Rose again, He is alive!

Chorus

Verse 3

At His name let praise begin,
Oceans roar, nature sing
For He comes to judge the earth,
In righteousness and in His truth.

Chorus x 2

Song (WT 237) **Jesus, Jesus, Jesus**

Jesus, Jesus, Jesus your love has melted my heart.

Repeat

Our prayers of intercession are led by Peter Fearn.

Prayers of Intercession

In the light of the news that Hearsall has just been granted a silver award as an eco - church, our prayers of intercession this week focus on environmental issues.

Loving Heavenly Father,

We pray for the Church: that she may be a beacon of hope throughout the world, reminding us all of our responsibility to care for and protect God's precious gift of creation.

We pray for the world we live in, our common home: that through God's grace we may hear its cry of the damage done and be moved to protect it for future generations to enjoy, that God may open our eyes to recognise the goodness of all creation and help us to do what we can to restore and care for the wonderful gift that we have been given.

We pray for those people who are already facing droughts, floods and storms: that God may grant them strength and hope for the future as they work to adapt to the changing climate.

We pray for our City and our local community: that through the grace of God we may hear the urgent cry of the earth and of the poor and be inspired to respond at this crucial time, that through God's grace we may be good neighbours to each other and to the whole of creation, restoring and caring for all that God has made.

We pray for world leaders: that God may grant them wisdom to make just decisions which respect the earth and all that lives in it, especially those who are poorest and most vulnerable.

And now, in a moment of quiet, we each bring to you the prayer which is at the forefront of our mind.

Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer. Amen.

Many thanks, Peter, for those prayers.

Our next song celebrates the beauty of God's world and calls us all into his loving service. *Things no eye has ever seen...*

Song Things That No Eye Has Ever Seen (Prue/Sutcliffe - based on Job 28 and 1 Corinthians 2: 6 -10)

Where eagles never spread their wings;
and lions never dare to roar;
where miners seek for jewels hid
within the darkness of the earth;
where unseen rivers start their course;
where fire and force have done their work;
where human feet could never walk;
the hidden treasures lurk.

Chorus

*Things that no eye has ever seen;
things that no ear has ever heard;
things that no mind has ever known;
God has kept for those who love.*

Lapis lazuli, topaz, coral,
jasper, rubies, silver, gold
delight our eyes as precious things,
mined and cut and set and sold.
Unfathomed seas their secrets keep
- what creatures in deep trenches live?
and death might hint at something more
that life, at last, can give.

Chorus

*Things that no eye has ever seen;
things that no ear has ever heard;
things that no mind has ever known;
God has kept for those who love.*

Before the dawn of time itself
a mystery had been stored for us,
then shown in Christ's triumphant death:
the might of grace, the power of love.
This is the wisdom we now choose:
a gentle grace to guide our ways;
a simple choice of life for all
inspired by holy fear.

Chorus

As islands flood and forests burn,
as plastic rubbish swirls in seas,
as glaciers melt and storms return,
as habitats are placed at risk
for creatures great and small alike:
the nations need a common goal
"A deep respect for all of life
that God has placed upon the earth."

Chorus x 2

We hear now our Bible readings from Luke and from Romans.

Readings

Luke 6: 46 - 49

The wise and foolish builders

⁴⁶ "Why do you call me, "Lord, Lord," and do not do what I say? ⁴⁷ As for everyone who comes to me and hears my words and puts them into practice, I will show you what they are like. ⁴⁸ They are like a man building a house, who dug down deep and laid the foundation on rock. When the flood came, the torrent struck that house but could not shake it, because it was well built. ⁴⁹ But the one who hears my words and does not put them into practice is like a man who built a house on the ground without a foundation. The moment the torrent struck that house, it collapsed and its destruction was complete.'

Romans 1: 14 - 25

¹⁴ I am a debtor both to Greeks and non-Greeks, both to the wise and the foolish. ¹⁵ That is why I am so eager to preach the gospel also to you who are in Rome.

¹⁶ For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes: first to the Jew, then to the Gentile. ¹⁷ For in the gospel the righteousness of God is revealed – a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: ‘The righteous will live by faith.’

God’s wrath against sinful humanity

¹⁸ The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of people, who suppress the truth by their wickedness, ¹⁹ since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. ²⁰ For since the creation of the world God’s invisible qualities – his eternal power and divine nature – have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that people are without excuse.

²¹ For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. ²² Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools ²³ and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like a mortal human being and birds and animals and reptiles.

²⁴ Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another. ²⁵ They exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshipped and served created things rather than the Creator – who is for ever praised. Amen.

Sermon

Deal or No Deal?

There’s a debate happening in the Baptist Union of Great Britain at the moment, and it is in danger of being very polarised. It has the potential to make our union of churches rather brittle, as people position themselves on one side of the argument or

the other. The argument concerns the definition of marriage, especially as it applies to Baptist Ministers.

Our current Ministerial Recognition Rules are clear that any sexual activity outside of heterosexual marriage is deemed gross misconduct. Because marriage in the rules is defined explicitly as being between a man and a woman, it follows that a minister in a legal non-celebrate marriage to a person of the same sex, would be deemed guilty of gross misconduct automatically, and would lose their ministerial accreditation.

Two years ago, the Baptist Union received a request to rectify this by dropping its explicit statement that marriage must be between a man and a woman. The request was signed by 70 people, mainly ministers, and has been working its way through the Union's decision-making processes.

Many other ministers take an opposing, traditional, conservative view. They feel that the Bible itself defines marriage as being between one man and one woman only. Genesis 2: 23 - 24 would, for them, be a key passage.

We hear Adam talking about Eve:

The man said,

*'This is now bone of my bones
and flesh of my flesh;
she shall be called "woman",
for she was taken out of man.'*

That is why a man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife, and they become one flesh.

According to Matthew 19, Jesus quotes this text when asked about divorce and says that no one should separate what God has joined together.

Those against the change also quote the prohibitive texts that seem to outlaw all homosexual activity. One of these is expressed in the verses from Romans 1, subsequent to our reading:

Because of this, God gave them over to shameful lusts. Even their women exchanged natural sexual relations for unnatural ones. In the same way the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another. Men committed shameful acts with other men, and received in themselves the due penalty for their error.

Now our denomination places great emphasis on the Bible. But the Bible needs to be interpreted. Both sides in the debate look at texts like these and begin arguments about interpretation. We are told perhaps that the original Hebrew had several shades of meaning, or that such and such a Greek word had several different definitions. We are told that the context of the ancient world was very different from our own. Each side in the argument can show by appeal to history, linguistics, and science why their interpretation is **the** correct one.

There is much value in such analysis, but I don't think it can, in the end, possibly lead to a satisfactory conclusion. My hunch is that both sides need to acknowledge that there are insights in the arguments of the other; and both sides need to admit, in all humility, that their viewpoints are not in fact proved beyond all reasonable doubt.

I may review some of these arguments in future sermons. For today I want to do something that puts all these arguments into perspective. There's something more simple, pure and central, that guides our behaviour prior to any discussion on the subtleties of drawing sexual ethics from ancient inspired literature.

For now, let us consider the well-loved tale of the wise man who built his house on the rock. What is its message, would you say? We so often think of it as a children's tale, and we sing a jolly song about it. But it's much more serious than that.

In both Luke and Matthew this parable appears as the conclusion to a grand, set-piece sermon - the sermon on the mount in Matthew, and here in our reading today from Luke, the sermon on the plain. It's the punchline to so much of Jesus' familiar teaching. What point is it making?

Jesus introduces the parable like this:

'Why do you call me, "Lord, Lord," and do not do what I say? As for everyone who comes to me and hears my words and puts them into practice, I will show you what they are like...'

The one who puts the teaching of Jesus **into practice** is like the wise man who builds a house on solid rock. The one who fails to put Jesus' teaching into practice is a foolish man who builds his house on sands and whose house will collapse into disaster.

I saw a FaceBook post last week - you may have seen it too. It showed a boy with Jesus in heaven asking why he was the only one there. Jesus replies, well everyone else's theology was a bit off. Mahatma Gandhi is said to have been turned away from church because he was a non-European. He later said in an interview, "I like your Christ, but not your Christianity." Unfortunately, tragically, Christians have often claimed to believe in Jesus but failed to live by his teaching.

Of course, belief still matters, because properly held-belief drives right behaviour. But the parable of the wise man who built his house on the rock is very clearly emphasising that, in the end, it's actually **living in line with Jesus' teaching** that rescues us from disaster and makes our lives worthwhile.

But what teaching are we talking about? Look back at the context. This parable comes at the end of Luke 6, often called the sermon on the plain. The teaching in question declares the blessing of poverty of spirit; and of hungering for a better humanity; and of being regarded as nothing much by the systems of the world! It is to love our enemies; to do good to those who mistreat us; to turn the other cheek; to walk the extra mile; to give freely to those who need our help; it's to be loving even to those who don't include us; it's not to be judgemental; to be generous-spirited; to see fault in ourselves before we see it in others; it's to be good-hearted and rooted in goodness and to speak good things out of a good heart.

And Jesus seriously taught this way of being human. Doctrine matters, but, if I understand Jesus correctly, living in this **deeply human manner** is prior to getting all our doctrine sorted out. It's a way of life. It's the Jesus way.

What adjectives would you use to describe this way of living? Gentle, humble, kind, truthful, powerful, generous, inclusive, good-hearted... To be like the man who builds his house on the rock is to live in this manner. If a person truly trying to follow Jesus' teaching encountered someone whose sexuality was different from their own, how might they respond?

They would notice their own faults before they saw the faults of the other. They would reflect on the failings in their own intimate relationships before they addressed the failings of others' intimate relationships. They would be welcoming, patient, kind, understanding and would want to discover good things in the life of the other. If they challenged the other, it would not be at the level of categories or clichés. Their challenge would see right to the heart of the other person.

I've already said that the later part of Romans 1 is used to chastise people who sexually love others of the same gender. But Paul's apparently anti-gay rhetoric is a consequence of something far more profound.

After saying, in our reading, that all people must get a sense of God's existence and character from the creation and nature of reality, Paul goes on to explore how it is that people nevertheless live sinfully. They know God from the beautiful world and yet they turn away from him. So Paul introduces the idea of an **exchange**.

People exchanged the glory of the Immortal God for images made to look like mortal human beings and birds, animals and reptiles. Paul is thinking of idol worship here. These idols are **two** steps away from God.

- First step: imagine worshipping created things: animals or people.
- Second step: imagine worshipping merely images of these created things.

It seems a very bad exchange. Why would people make it?

Imagine a human relationship. Suppose a man is in love with a woman. Suppose the woman makes a beautiful pot. And then suppose he takes a photo of the pot his beloved has made. And then suppose he carries a photograph of the pot wherever he goes and really likes having it with him. And then suppose he gets to prefer the picture of the pot that his beloved has made over a real relationship with his beloved!

It's very convenient! The pot itself, though made by the beloved, is, after all, a bit fragile and bulky. And the beloved herself can be rather inconvenient making demands of him and wanting to spend lots of time with him. Whereas the photo can fit neatly into his wallet. It's convenient and portable. What's more, he can ignore it whenever he chooses, and just take out the photo when he needs some comfort. Paul is saying that people have done something like this with God! They've made him portable, controllable, ignorable and useful. Consumer Christianity makes Jesus very convenient.

And Christian culture can have precisely this effect, specifically traditions, liturgies, songs, lectionaries, structures, doctrines, theology and all the churchy stuff we may create. But God in Godself demands something more - a direct and real encounter with him.

For me, Christianity only makes sense if following Jesus makes us **more** humane, better people. For the mature Christian, no doctrine or theology, however accurate they may be, can ever replace a lived-out, full-blooded humanity in the light of God's presence. Jesus' way of living is what saves us.

So, whatever we may think about Baptist ministers being able to be married to people of the same gender, this never excuses us from being decent, humane, inclusive, kind and loving people. Perhaps the only resolution for the Baptist Union will be to allow churches to differ on this important matter. Those who sincerely believe that homosexual marriage is entirely inconsistent with biblical teaching must be free to minister and worship accordingly. They mustn't be brow-beaten into a more liberal view. But those who see things differently must also be free to minister and worship according to their views. Baptists stand for **freedom of conscience**, and we also believe that each church congregation has the competence and the right to interpret the Bible as they sense Christ is leading them.

This argument leads to the conclusion that the ministerial recognition rules must be changed, because currently they insist that only **one** interpretation of this issue is correct, that is the conservative one.

I called this talk, *Deal or No deal?* and I was referring to Paul's notion of the Exchange. Do we go along with the deal that most people seem to have bought into - the deal to swap the deep reality of God for things made to look like things that God has made? Do we keep him at arm's length, under control, a God whom we can manipulate to our own agendas, who is therefore no God at all?

It's so simple and easy to buy into this deal. We then know who's right and who's wrong. We go with labels and groups, refusing to see the God-like humanity within each person we encounter. We see a gay person and respond not to their heart, but by a play book we have received.

The follower of Jesus is building their house on something more solid: they remember the blessing of having a poor spirit; and of hungering for a better humanity; and of being regarded as nothing much by the systems of the world! They seriously try to love those who oppose them; to do good to those who act against them; to prefer to suffer a bit more themselves rather than visit suffering in response to another; to walk the extra mile in order to help one who is struggling; to give freely to those who need our help. Followers of Jesus refuse the deal and are loving even to those who exclude them from their cosy circles; they are not judgemental but always show a generous spirit; they see fault in themselves long before they call it out in others; they are good-hearted and rooted in goodness and speak good things out of their good heart.

And may we at Hearsall dare to live this Jesus way, not just in respect to the debate I've been discussing today, but in all our living and praying and considering and serving... If we really lived according to Luke 6, we would transform our church, our community and ultimately our world.

Hymn (BPW 383) **Immortal, Invisible**

Immortal, invisible, God only wise,
In light inaccessible hid from our eyes,
Most blessed, most glorious, the Ancient of Days,
Almighty, victorious, thy great name we praise.

Unresting, unhasting, and silent as light,
Nor wanting, nor wasting, thou rulest in might;
Thy justice like mountains high soaring above
Thy clouds, which are fountains of goodness and love.

To all life thou givest, to both great and small;
In all life thou livest, the true life of all;
We blossom and flourish as leaves on the tree,
And wither and perish but nought changeth thee.

Great Father of glory, pure Father of light,
Thine angels adore thee, all veiling their sight;
But of all thy rich graces, this grace, Lord, impart –
Take the veil from our faces, the veil from our heart.

All praise we would render; O help us to see
'Tis only the splendour of light hideth thee,
And so let thy glory, Almighty, impart
Through Christ in the story, Thy Christ to the heart.

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.