

Order of Service for 17th July 2022

Everything Fits Together

Welcome

Hello, and welcome to Hearsall at Home for 17th July 2022. Today we consider that Jesus holds everything together in a world where everything seems to fall apart. And today we share in Holy Communion, so you might like to take some moments to prepare for that.

Call to Worship

¹⁵ The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. ¹⁶ For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him. ¹⁷ He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. ¹⁸ And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy. ¹⁹ For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, ²⁰ and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.

(Colossians 1: 15 - 20)

Our opening hymn proclaims the saving victory of Christ on the cross.

Hymn (BPW 306) **Christ Triumphant**

1 Christ triumphant, ever reigning, Saviour, Master, King!
Lord of heaven, our lives sustaining, hear us as we sing:

*Yours the glory and the crown,
the high renown, the eternal name!*

2 Word incarnate, truth revealing, Son of Man on earth!
Power and majesty concealing by your humble birth:

*Yours the glory and the crown,
the high renown, the eternal name!*

3 Suffering servant, scorned, ill - treated, victim crucified!
Death is through the cross defeated, sinners justified:

*Yours the glory and the crown,
the high renown, the eternal name!*

4 Priestly king, enthroned for ever high in heaven above!
Sin and death and hell shall never stifle hymns of love:

*Yours the glory and the crown,
the high renown, the eternal name!*

5 So, our hearts and voices raising through the ages long,
ceaselessly upon you gazing, this shall be our song:

*Yours the glory and the crown,
the high renown, the eternal name!*

Prayer (Joy Cowley)

Dear God, I would like to become a little child and rest my soul in you. I'm tired of the loneliness, tired of the struggle. I want to surrender but I don't know how. You see, I have this problem of being adult.

I belong to the generation which makes decisions, plans, works, accepts responsibility, takes pride in being independent. Adults are supposed to manage their lives. They are concerned with owning things and making things happen, and they don't like to look small or foolish. Dear God, for a long time I've been living at the centre of a world which has prevented me from entering the Kingdom of Heaven.

Father God, Mother God, show me how to become your child. I am aware of the advice that Jesus gives. He does not say that we should remain in infancy. He says that we should become as little children. This tells me that I need to know the futility of independence before I can let go of it.

It is the letting go which is difficult. I know you are there, waiting to give yourself to me, but I'm afraid to commit myself.

Please help me to loosen this grip on my pride, so that I can hold out my arms to you and be enfolded in your love.

Our Father, who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name;
thy kingdom come;
thy will be done;
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those who trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation;
but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom,
the power and the glory,
for ever and ever.
Amen.

In my ordinariness, in my indecision, in my brokenness, my Lord Jesus, I join the great songs of praise around the world, and I choose to honour your holy name.
Amen.

Offering

Gift-giving God, we bless you for making us like you, and for giving us opportunities to share. Take all our gifts and use them to usher your kingdom a little closer. Amen.

Our hope as Christians is founded on Jesus. We remember him as we sing, *There is a redeemer!*

Song (WT 413) **There is a Redeemer**

There is a Redeemer,
Jesus, God's own son,
Precious Lamb of God, Messiah,
Holy One.

Chorus

*Thank you, O my Father,
For giving us your son,
And leaving your Spirit
'Til the work on Earth is done.*

Jesus my Redeemer,
Name above all names,
Precious Lamb of God, Messiah,
O for sinners slain.

Chorus

When I stand in glory
I will see his face,
And there I'll serve my King forever,
In that holy place.

Chorus

This week our prayers of intercession are led by Sandra Noel.

Prayers of Intercession

Be still and know the love of God.

In You, O Lord, we put our trust.

Father, we come to You now knowing that You love each one of us.

Help us to feel that love surrounding us, guiding us, and protecting us now and in the days ahead.

As we look at the News programmes, we know that so many folk live in fear and despair, not knowing what tomorrow might bring. Parents see no hope for their children and worry for their safety.

Father, give all those who lead the wisdom to seek justice and peace, helping to break down barriers that divide nations. We pray for peace in Ukraine, where Russia is causing problems, for Afghanistan, and for Sri Lanka, and Columbia, where there are economic problems. We pray for Aid agencies who are helping. Give them all the resources they need and help us to be generous in our giving.

We pray for our own country – for those making decisions about the leadership of the Conservative Party, and hence the future Prime Minister. Give honesty and integrity to candidates as they state their plans for leadership.

We pray for those leaving school this week; those going to do further study, those starting work, and those who are not sure what tomorrow will bring. Help them to get used to new ways, new ideas, and new people. Give them the wisdom to know what is right and the courage to do it.

We know, Lord, that there are those youngsters who cause destruction in their neighbourhood, some using knives to stab others, sometimes causing pain and death. We pray for the families of those desperate souls and for all social workers and prison officers, who try to repair the broken lives.

Father, we pray for our church, for David and Leoni and our fellowship here. Our fellowship includes Sarah, Lee and their lovely family in Benin. Father, keep them well and keep them safe. May they be able to share the love they have for You with all those that they meet. Many are on holiday at present. Enable them to be refreshed in mind, body and soul, so that they return more able to do and carry on with the tasks that life gives them.

Some of our friends have Covid and are quite poorly. We pray for them, that healing will soon be complete.

Hear our prayers, Lord, for we ask them in the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord and Saviour. AMEN.

Many thanks Sandra for those prayers. Let's attend to our Bible readings now from Amos and from Luke.

Bible Readings

Amos 8: 1 - 12

A basket of ripe fruit

8 This is what the Sovereign LORD showed me: a basket of ripe fruit. ² 'What do you see, Amos?' he asked.

'A basket of ripe fruit,' I answered.

Then the LORD said to me, 'The time is ripe for my people Israel; I will spare them no longer.

³ 'In that day,' declares the Sovereign LORD, 'the songs in the temple will turn to wailing. Many, many bodies – flung everywhere! Silence!'

⁴ Hear this, you who trample the needy
and do away with the poor of the land,

⁵ saying,

'When will the New Moon be over
that we may sell grain,
and the Sabbath be ended
that we may market wheat?'

–skimping on the measure,
boosting the price
and cheating with dishonest scales,

⁶ buying the poor with silver
and the needy for a pair of sandals,
selling even the sweepings with the wheat.

⁷ The LORD has sworn by himself, the Pride of Jacob: 'I will never forget anything they have done.

⁸ 'Will not the land tremble for this,
and all who live in it mourn?

The whole land will rise like the Nile;
it will be stirred up and then sink
like the river of Egypt.

⁹ 'In that day,' declares the Sovereign LORD,

'I will make the sun go down at noon
and darken the earth in broad daylight.

¹⁰ I will turn your religious festivals into mourning
and all your singing into weeping.

I will make all of you wear sackcloth

and shave your heads.

I will make that time like mourning for an only son
and the end of it like a bitter day.

¹¹ 'The days are coming,' declares the Sovereign LORD,
'when I will send a famine through the land –
not a famine of food or a thirst for water,
but a famine of hearing the words of the LORD.

¹² People will stagger from sea to sea
and wander from north to east,
searching for the word of the LORD,
but they will not find it.

Luke 10: 38 - 42

At the home of Martha and Mary

³⁸ As Jesus and his disciples were on their way, he came to a village where a woman named Martha opened her home to him. ³⁹ She had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet listening to what he said. ⁴⁰ But Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made. She came to him and asked, 'Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!'

⁴¹ 'Martha, Martha,' the Lord answered, 'you are worried and upset about many things, ⁴² but few things are needed – or indeed only one. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her.'

Song (WT 336) **Open our Eyes, Lord**

Open our eyes, Lord,
We want to see Jesus,
To reach out and touch Him
And say that we love Him.
Open our ears, Lord,
And help us to listen.
Open our eyes, Lord,
We want to see Jesus.

Sermon

Everything Fits Together

Many of us will remember the catchphrase of Private Fraser from Dad's Army... *Doomed, doomed, we're all doomed!* With rising prices, war in Europe and climate change, Fraser's cry can feel all too near the mark! But how should Christians respond to the mood of doom that sometimes is in our zeitgeist right now? Should we share the mood and offer lamentations and tears as our religion? Or should we challenge it, and offer hope beyond our immediate circumstances?

Many of the biblical prophets are known as prophets of doom, and the first of them to minister, Amos, is no exception. The oracle we heard begins with an ominous basket of over-ripe fruit. The time is ripe for judgement.

In the words of Irish poet, W. B. Yeats, *things fall apart* in Amos's vision. The rich are separated from the poor in their hearts, and this allows them to trample the needy and do away with the poor. Business leaders are separated from their customers in their hearts, and this allows them to skimp, fix prices and cheat ordinary people. Worship is separated from daily life and is at best an irrelevant time of singing and ritual, and at worst a resented interruption to the obsessive practice of making money at all costs.

Amos' language is violent and extreme, and some of it reads like a scene from a post-apocalypse Hollywood blockbuster. Bodies are flung everywhere. Wailing fills the temple. The very land trembles. Darkness falls at noon. People stagger and wander aimlessly, searching for the Word of the Lord, but not finding it.

Why is the language so extreme? Amos is sounding a loud alarm to awaken people from their complacency. Price-fixing and exploitation of ordinary people are extremely serious matters. The wealthy elite of Judah need to wake up and smell the coffee.

Now to come back to today, I don't pretend to understand completely the current rises in energy prices. Typical household bills may rise above £3,000 per year. This enormous hike will be devastating to many ordinary households and is directly

related to the war in Ukraine, and of course to the actions of Russia. Amos might want to know, who is profiting from these outrageous price rises? Who is getting fat at the expense of ordinary people? He might have had a harsh word for big business leaders today.

But it seems to me that we should also think more long term than that. The potentially catastrophic effects of burning fossil fuels on our climate have been known for decades. If our political and business systems were attuned to what is right and good, we would already be in a position where burning gas for domestic heating was largely phased out.

Were I caught up in a protest of *Extinction Rebellion*, perhaps a long-cherished holiday plan scuppered by some airport disruption, I am sure I would be extremely frustrated and even very angry. But can we see such a protest group as being a bit like old Amos? Are protestors sounding the alarm loud and clear and painfully, so that at last we feel in our guts the unprecedented urgency of the need to act, and act now, or the darkness at noon will be our experience. It is time to lament and repent.

* * *

The terrible controversies of Amos' day are now literally ancient history. The angst of WB Yeats whom I quote earlier - in the aftermath of the devastation of the first world war and a fearful flu pandemic that nearly killed his pregnant wife - belongs to a century ago. Terrible things happen but, at the risk of sounding blasé, life moves on.

Our job is not to be trapped by the past, but to create a better future. We are not those who will sit around wringing our hands and writing gloomy poems about things falling apart! We have a steadfast, certain, perennial hope! And it's our job to proclaim it.

How can we find the vision, the energy and the truth we need to build that future? My answer is in just one word: **Jesus!**

Jesus makes all the difference. The Mary-Martha story is often heard as being about contemplatives being much more important than activists. That is absolute balderdash!

Look at the context: Luke chapter 10. In that chapter, Jesus sends out 72 people on a mission trip. In that chapter, Jesus tells the story of the good Samaritan, who cared for the mugged man on the road. Whatever the story of Martha and Mary teaches, it can't be saying contemplation-good-action-bad!

After all, Jesus was an activist! He healed the sick, challenged the powerful, fed the hungry and raised the dead to life. Action is good! But Jesus was **also** a contemplative who spent nights in prayer and lived from a sense of union with Father God.

Martha was distracted by a great many things, but few were needed: in fact, only one. Mary has chosen what is better and it will not be taken from her. Doesn't that suggest that sitting listening to Jesus as Mary was, is the **only** thing that matters? Well, yes and no, but not really, because, if we sit and listen to Jesus, he tells us, after a time, to get up from our backsides and love our enemies, make peace, walk the extra mile and care for victims of violence.

No one should be stuck in the kitchen whilst important men listen to God and consider what really matters. Connection with God, through Jesus, is for **everyone**. Everyone is invited to sit at Jesus' feet. The Jesus portrayed in the gospels looks for hearts transformed by the grace of God, leading to lives transformed in loving service. It all fits together.

* * *

A friend of mine, Derek, had kept in touch with an old friend on the phone for many years. His friend's voice had always sounded just the same. But recently Derek saw him on a video call and was astonished at how much his old buddy had changed. The bald, overweight red-skinned sixty-something year old in front of him was not the man Derek remembered from university days.

At the top of the service today we heard a very different post-apocalyptic vision from that of Amos. Those words from the rather mystical book of Colossians are startling indeed.

Jesus is like God on a video call. Want to know what God is like? Look at the Son, who is, according to Colossians, the image of the invisible God. If Jesus invites Martha to leave the kitchen for a bit, and share in listening to the word of God, then that is not just a good idea; it's what God is like.

God longs for an end to the famine of hearing the word of the Lord, and for everyone to sit at his feet. God invites you - however busy you may be, or however unimportant you may feel - he invites you to be his child, to sit at his feet, to be honoured, loved and blessed and to serve him in the world.

The vision might seem a bit abstract. Everything comes from the Son. He is prior to everything. Everything holds together in him. All the fullness of God - everything about God - may be seen in Jesus.

And if things fall apart in the world at large, well, in Christ the opposite happens. God reconciles all things to himself - making peace through his blood shed on the cross. Because that's what God is like.

* * *

The James Webb telescope has sent infrared images of a galaxy far, far away. We are seeing that galaxy as it was nearly 5 billion years ago. But behind this galaxy, the telescope shows images of galaxies that are much further away and therefore much older - 13 billion light years away.

Cosmologists depict the universe as this explosion of everything always away from a central point. *Things fall apart* might describe it. The centre cannot hold, to quote more of Yeats' poem. So, can we take seriously the Bible's claim that everything is held together in God?

No doubt the writer of Colossians was imagining a very different cosmology. The language of reconciliation applied to human beings and spiritual entities in the heavenly realms being won over by the power of the cross.

The second law of thermodynamics says that everything tends towards greater disorder and chaos – again, things fall apart. But the first law of spirituality is that everything is held together in Christ. The unimaginable vastness of the divergent

expanding universe demands a concept of God who is bigger than anything ever can be, and older than anything ever can be.

And here and now, **this** God who holds all things together in Christ, holds you too. To be converted to Christ is to become aware of that fact and to live our lives by it. Everything fits together in Christ. Everyone is called to sit at his feet. Everyone is called to allow him to transform their heart, to break down what is hard into something soft; to heat up our hearts when they are cold. We come to worship to sit at Jesus' feet, to marvel at the wonder of his grace, to be made again children of God, to receive our calling as princes and princesses of his kingdom, to hear again his grave call to steward this precious blue jewel of a planet floating through the vast array of the universe, and to live our lives from the cross.

A God who is vaster and older than the universe is fully expressed in Christ. And a God who abounds in grace and mercy, and overflows with steadfast lovingkindness, calls us to sit at his feet, so that he may shape our lives into a cruciform shape, and energise us to be his public agents in a confused and sceptical world where it feels like everything is falling apart.

So come out of the kitchen for a moment and marvel. Come to the communion table and remember how the Lord God, King of the Universe, sent his Son to die on a cross to make you whole.

Prayer

Loving Lord, our hearts cannot possibly grasp you; our minds cannot begin to understand you; nevertheless, we marvel to think that you call each one of us to come and sit with you and to commune with you and to be transformed by you, and to be shaped by you. So, Lord, I do come. Here I am, Lord, ordinary as I am, I sit at your feet, and I feel your love again. Lord, forgive me for wandering around in my own way, not really getting everything right; confused and uncertain. Forgive me for all of my failings and flaws. Thank you that Jesus died to make me whole. Fill me with the power of that life-transforming love. Break down my hard heart; warm up my cold heart; give me a heart of flesh not a heart of stone; and let me live in communion with you; and then Lord, send me out, out in the world to live and work and serve for your honour and your renown. Amen.

As we prepare for communion we sing, *Meekness and Majesty*.

Song (WT 291) **Meekness and Majesty**

Verse 1

Meekness and majesty,
Manhood and Deity,
In perfect harmony,
The Man who is God.
Lord of eternity
Dwells in humanity,
Kneels in humility
And washes our feet.

Chorus

*O what a mystery,
Meekness and majesty.
Bow down and worship,
For this is your God,
This is your God.*

Verse 2

Father's pure radiance,
Perfect in innocence,
Yet learns obedience
To death on a cross.
Suffering to give us life,
Conquering through sacrifice,
And as they crucify
Prays: 'Father forgive.'

Chorus

Verse 3

Wisdom unsearchable,
God the invisible,
Love indestructible
In frailty appears.
Lord of infinity,
Stooping so tenderly,
Lifts our humanity
To the heights of His throne.

Chorus

Ending

Bow down and worship, x 3
For this is your God,
This is your God.

Holy Communion

Invitation

The table of the Lord is spread. It is for those who will come and see in broken bread and poured out wine symbols of his life shed for us on the cross and raised again on the third day. The risen Christ is present among his people, and it is here that we meet him. It is for those who know him a little and long to know him more. We invite all who are seeking him and all who are weary of their sin and doubt to come and share in the feast.

Prayer of Preparation

Loving Lord, we come to this table not trusting in our own merits but relying on your great mercy and forgiveness. We acknowledge our sin before you. In our thoughts, words and deeds; in our omissions and in our carelessness; we have erred in your sight. We are truly sorry and seek for your forgiveness through Jesus Christ, our Lord and Saviour, whose blood was shed to bring us mercy. Amen.

Prayers for the Fellowship

Loving Lord, we pray for our life as a church. Grant each one of us a deeper and richer connection with you and make us agents of revival in a lost world. Break down any barriers among us, mould us again into a loving fellowship, and let our communal life be a living proof of your saving power. Amen.

Gospel Words

God loved the world so much that he gave his only Son, that everyone who has faith in him may not die but have eternal life.

For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in Jesus, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.

Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.

Words of Institution

For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you: The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, "This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me." In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me." For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

Prayer of Thanksgiving

Loving Lord Jesus, for this bread and wine we give you our thanks. A loaf speaks of the unity of a family gathered round a table; of the fertility of the earth; of the skills of farmers and bakers; and of provision for our bodies. Wine speaks of glad hearts; fruitful vines; the skills of vineyard growers and winemakers; and of people brought together in celebration. And now they speak, too, of your body broken to make us whole; of your blood spilt to make us clean; of the oneness of the church in earth and in heaven; and of the celebration in glory at the end of all time. For bread and for wine and for all they mean to us today, we give you our thanks.

Breaking and Sharing of Bread

Jesus said, "This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me."

We share bread together in communion with him and with one another.

Sharing the Cup

In the same way after supper Jesus took the cup. He said, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me."

We drink wine together.

Prayer of Thanksgiving

Loving Lord, we thank you for meeting with us as we have shared bread and wine together. We praise and bless you for your mercy when we were sinners; for enfolding us in your body when we were alone; and for calling us to live like shining stars of light, when we had become jaded.

United, we choose a life of loving fellowship;

forgiven, we rise to a life of worship;

sent out, we embrace a life of gospel-sharing in word and deed.

Take us this day and every day and make us living sacrifices and joyful witnesses of your everlasting, all-embracing love. Amen.

Our closing hymn is, *The Kingdom of God is justice and joy.*

Hymn (BPW 321) **The Kingdom of God is Justice and Joy**

The Kingdom of God

Is justice and joy,

For Jesus restores

What sin would destroy;

God's power and glory

In Jesus we know,

And here and hereafter

That kingdom shall grow.

2. The kingdom of God
Is mercy and grace,
The lepers are cleansed,
The sinners find place,
The outcasts are welcomed
God's banquet to share,
And hope is awakened
In place of despair.

3. The kingdom of God
Is challenge and choice,
Believe the good news,
Repent and rejoice!
His love for us sinners
Brought Christ to his cross,
Our crisis of judgement
For gain or for loss.

4. God's kingdom is come,
The gift and the goal,
In Jesus begun,
In heaven made whole;
The heirs of the kingdom
Shall answer his call,
And all things cry glory
To God all in all!

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.