

14th June 2020

Hearsall at Home

Hello, and welcome to Hearsall at Home.

We hope that you listen to this service either on a Sunday morning, or at another time, and you will worship, sing, pray and reflect on the scriptures along with all of us.

A written copy of the service is also available as a download on our website, so if you know anyone who would like that please let us know.

If you can get online you'll find me in my Whereby room after the service: Bring your cup of coffee to whereby.com/sutcliffechat and see who's there. There's still room for more!

So sit down, be still, and prepare yourself to worship God with us.

Order of Service 14 6 2020

The Rhythm of Life

Invitation to Worship

God chose a moment in time at the very centre of history to show his love for us all.

6 You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. 7 Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous person, though for a good person someone might possibly dare to die. 8 But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

Hymn (BPW 553)

Great is your faithfulness, O God my Father
You have fulfilled all your promise to me;
You never fail and your love is unchanging,
All you have been you for ever will be.

Great is your faithfulness!
Great is your faithfulness!
Morning by morning new mercies I see;
All I have needed your hand has provided -
Great is your faithfulness, Father, to me.

Summer and winter, and springtime and harvest,
Sun, moon and stars in their courses above
Join with all nature in eloquent witness
To your great faithfulness, mercy and love.

Pardon for sin, and a peace everlasting,
Your loving presence to cheer and to guide;
Strength for today, and bright hope for tomorrow -
These are the blessings your love will provide.

Prayers

In the slow pace of the turning galaxies.
In the rapid spinning of the unseen atoms.
In the regular breathing of the human lung,
In the powerful rhythm of a lively tune,
In the daily events of dawn and dusk,
We sense the beat of your heart
And with delight in our soul we dance to heaven's melodies.
And praise you, the source of all that is good.

We pause and take a moment to reflect on times when we have been out of sync with God's rhythm. Forgive us for our sins O Lord, spoken, thought, or done, for the sake of Jesus Christ our Lord and Saviour. Amen.

This week instead of saying the Lord's Prayer we sing *Let my soul be as a sponge*, whose chorus is a loose reflection of the prayer that Jesus taught.

Song

Let my soul be as a sponge
soaking up the water
of your gentle way of life.
Let my soul be as a drum
forever resonating
with the rhythm of your heart.

*Your parenting brings confidence!
Your kingship perfect harmony!
Your will is shared prosperity!
Your bread is baked for everyone!
Your pardon cascades liberty!
Oh rescue me from counterfeits:
I choose to live your way!
I choose to live your way!*

Let my soul be as a boat
coursing on the current
of the river of your love.
Let my soul be as a child
tenderly enfolded
in the cradle of your arms.

Let my soul be as a star
shining as a portent
of the coming of the king!
Let my soul be truly wild
energised to labour
for the way things ought to be.

Let my soul be as a drum, forever resonating with the rhythm of your heart...

Now, Behind Closed Doors this week was written by our lovely friend Val Taylor, and is read by the equally lovely Peter Fearn.

Behind Closed Doors

Hello everyone,
Rufus in his sparkly shirt, Jean and Dorothy resplendent in red
Martin and Nick tuning up, and Sandra and Derek looking mischievous!
How I miss you all!
I'm Val, the one in the front row with glasses surgically attached to her head.
My house arrest has been chaotic.
Vet. bills, lost cat, electrics failing, flooded kitchen then the cat returns with a live rodent,
resulting in all my large kitchen appliances breaking down due to nibbled cables.

On top of that I become a victim of identity fraud.
Who on earth would want to be me?
Even I don't want to be me at times!!
So while everyone else was socially distancing, I was entertaining plumbers, electricians and pest control!
Then opening mail informing me I now held an account with Next and was a life long member of some dubious club in Milton Keynes!
Hopefully everything seems fairly peaceful now.
The dog has recovered, the cat returned, the lodgers gone and, after four weeks, I have a new fridge freezer.
I find myself smiling at it and saying "I'm so glad you're here".
I have to remind myself that it's an inanimate object.
Then I remember all the poor souls suffering due to Covid and I feel ashamed of my small, insignificant worries.
I say thank you to everyone, my lovely postman, my refuse collectors, food delivery
The wonderful N.H.S.
I went into raptures when my window cleaner returned, quite embarrassed the poor chap.
My old Romanian dog, Bessie has been unable to have her hair cut. It has been difficult to tell which end is which.
Dial a dogwash returned and once again I was delirious with joy.
Bessie wasn't, and I'm sure the cats sniggered. She now resembles a pregnant walrus.
So, my lovely Hearsall friends, thank you for the phone calls, for the love I can feel from you.
Thank you my sweet Rev. for your patience and fortitude.
Thank you dear Peter for reading this .
Thank you God for being with me always.
God bless us all, everyone.

Val and Bessie, Tabitha and Evil Edna.

Offering

For all your good gifts O Lord, we give you our praise. Now take our own humble gifts to church and to charity to bring light, hope and practical care to the world that you have made.

Our next song is one that Jackie Pritchard remembers singing as a girl at school, and she recently rediscovered it online. Do any of you remember this one? Maybe get in touch with Jackie to share your memories of singing *Daisies are our silver...*

Song

Daisies are our silver,
Buttercups our gold:
This is all the treasure
We can have or hold.

Raindrops are our diamonds
And the morning dew;
While for shining sapphires
We've the speedwell blue.

These shall be our emeralds-
Leaves so new and green;
Roses make the reddest
Rubies ever seen.

God, who gave these treasures
To your children small,
Teach us how to love them
And grow like them all.

Make us bright as silver:
Make us good as gold;
Warm as summer roses
Let our hearts unfold.

Gay as leaves in April,
Clear as drops of dew-
God, who made the speedwell,
Keep us true to you.

Our prayers this week are led by Roger Woodward.

Prayers of Intercession

Almighty God our loving and heavenly Father we come to you today to share with you those things that are on our hearts and minds. We come not just to speak but also to listen. We thank you for all the opportunities we have had over these last weeks to reflect upon our lives. To slow down and see again what is really important to us. To let the scales fall from our eyes and to see again the wonderful world in which we live. To recognise afresh how important other people are to us. We thank you for the many people who, over these last few weeks, have found new ways of expressing their love for us. We come now to pray for that world in which we live.

We pray for all people across the world caught up in the Coronavirus epidemic. For those whose bodies are racked with pain through this infection. For those close to them unable to visit, to touch, to comfort. For doctors and nurses who care at the bedside and often become surrogate next of kin in the last hours of life here. For those unable to gather together to give thanks for the life of a relative or close friend Support such people mentally, physically and emotionally. We pray for all involved in research to find a vaccine and for people willing to test out such findings

Father God speak to us and use us to bring love and hope. *Silence*

As we move away from "lockdown" give wisdom and insight to those in our nation who have to make difficult decisions about our freedom. For our government both nationally and locally. For our own Councillors here in Coventry. For those reopening their businesses For those returning to school give wisdom to staff as they seek new and safe ways for education. For ourselves and our communities that we might consider others before our own need and use our common sense.

Father God speak to us and use us to bring love and hope. *Silence*

We pray for countless communities across the world suffering injustice, for victims of racial discrimination, for those driven from their homelands who tramp across the world as refugees, for people who are abused, for those who are exploited for their labour and not paid a realistic wage, for those who live in constant fear and hunger. Give a voice to the voiceless.

Father God speak to us and use us to bring love and hope. *Silence*

We pray for our churches as they open their doors for personal prayer, give wisdom to our leaders as they respond to this changing situation.

Father God pour your Spirit upon us that we may become more effectively your hands, your ears, your voice and your feet wherever we may be.

Amen.

And we thank Roger for those thoughtful prayers.

Our Bible readings today from Genesis and Matthew: a very long one from Genesis and a very short one from Matthew.

Readings

Genesis 1: 1 - 2:3

1 In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. 2 Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.

3 And God said, 'Let there be light,' and there was light. 4 God saw that the light was good, and he separated the light from the darkness. 5 God called the light 'day', and the darkness he called 'night'. And there was evening, and there was morning – the first day.

6 And God said, 'Let there be a vault between the waters to separate water from water.' 7 So God made the vault and separated the water under the vault from the water above it. And it was so. 8 God called the vault 'sky'. And there was evening, and there was morning – the second day.

9 And God said, 'Let the water under the sky be gathered to one place, and let dry ground appear.' And it was so. 10 God called the dry ground 'land', and the gathered waters he called 'seas'. And God saw that it was good.

11 Then God said, 'Let the land produce vegetation: seed-bearing plants and trees on the land that bear fruit with seed in it, according to their various kinds.' And it was so. 12 The land produced vegetation: plants bearing seed according to their kinds and trees bearing fruit with seed in it according to their kinds. And God saw that it was good. 13 And there was evening, and there was morning – the third day.

14 And God said, 'Let there be lights in the vault of the sky to separate the day from the night, and let them serve as signs to mark sacred times, and days and years, 15 and let them be lights in the vault of the sky to give light on the earth.' And it was so. 16 God made

two great lights – the greater light to govern the day and the lesser light to govern the night. He also made the stars. 17 God set them in the vault of the sky to give light on the earth, 18 to govern the day and the night, and to separate light from darkness. And God saw that it was good. 19 And there was evening, and there was morning – the fourth day.

20 And God said, 'Let the water teem with living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the vault of the sky.' 21 So God created the great creatures of the sea and every living thing with which the water teems and that moves about in it, according to their kinds, and every winged bird according to its kind. And God saw that it was good. 22 God blessed them and said, 'Be fruitful and increase in number and fill the water in the seas, and let the birds increase on the earth.' 23 And there was evening, and there was morning – the fifth day.

24 And God said, 'Let the land produce living creatures according to their kinds: the livestock, the creatures that move along the ground, and the wild animals, each according to its kind.' And it was so. 25 God made the wild animals according to their kinds, the livestock according to their kinds, and all the creatures that move along the ground according to their kinds. And God saw that it was good.

26 Then God said, 'Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals,[a] and over all the creatures that move along the ground.'

27 So God created mankind in his own image,
in the image of God he created them;
male and female he created them.

28 God blessed them and said to them, 'Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground.'

29 Then God said, 'I give you every seed-bearing plant on the face of the whole earth and every tree that has fruit with seed in it. They will be yours for food. 30 And to all the beasts of the earth and all the birds in the sky and all the creatures that move along the ground – everything that has the breath of life in it – I give every green plant for food.' And it was so.

31 God saw all that he had made, and it was very good. And there was evening, and there was morning – the sixth day.

Ch 2:1 Thus the heavens and the earth were completed in all their vast array.

2 By the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing; so on the seventh day he rested from all his work. 3 Then God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it he rested from all the work of creating that he had done.

Matthew 13: 31 - 33

31 He told them another parable: 'The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and planted in his field. 32 Though it is the smallest of all seeds, yet when it grows,

it is the largest of garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds come and perch in its branches.'

33 He told them still another parable: 'The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed into about thirty kilograms of flour until it worked all through the dough.'

Hymn (BPW 132)

Morning has broken
Like the first morning,
Blackbird has spoken
Like the first bird.
Praise for the singing!
Praise for the morning!
Praise for them, springing
Fresh from the Word!

Sweet the rain's new fall
Sunlit from Heaven,
Like the first dewfall
On the first grass.
Praise for the sweetness
Of the wet garden,
Sprung in completeness
Where his feet pass.

Mine is the sunlight,
Mine is the morning,
Born of the one light
Eden saw play.
Praise with elation,
Praise every morning,
God's re-creation
Of the new day!

Sermon

The rhythm of life

Some quiz questions to start:

Think of the heart of a blue whale - how many times per minute does it beat, when diving?
What of the heart an Etruscan shrew which I think has the fastest heartbeat of any mammal -
how many times per minute?

A human heart beats at around 60 - 100 times per minute at rest. By comparison, an adagio in classical music might be played at around 70 beats per minute, so music often goes at the same sort of rate as a heart beat.

During lockdown, some have been disoriented to realise that they don't know what day it is because the normal rhythm of life has been disrupted. So it has helped many to retain a habit of Sunday worship. Whilst some may listen to this service when doing the ironing on a Monday evening, most of us like to gather at 10:30 on a Sunday. Sticking to the normal rhythm gives us a sense of connection - we are in the same dance as one another.

That rhythm of weekly rest was integrated into the first of the creation stories in Genesis. After six days of work, God rested, and God's community of people are invited to do the same. Life is not to be an unending frenetic activity in which we are so fearful of what we may not rest from labour. The gift of Sabbath expresses trust in God, and fosters a serene, thankful and joyful approach to life.

Genesis 1 also includes a daily rhythm of creative activity. God said... God saw... It was good... The first day.... According to this great poem, the created order is intimately connected with the Creator.

The poem shows God creating within this daily rhythm. But, like a poet, he creates by speaking words. God said "Let there be light," and there was light... God said "Let the land produce vegetation: seed-bearing plants and trees on land that bear fruit with seed in it, according to their various kinds," and it was so.

The rhythm of the poetry includes the declaration of goodness, and the repeated formula: And there was evening, and there was morning - the third day....

And we read of two blessings in our Genesis text. The first one is a midweek blessing for fish of the seas and the birds of the air and the trees and the plants and the sun and the moon and the stars... The poetry tells us that God's blessing is not human-centric - God blessed creation before humans came to be.

The relation between creation and creator is like the relation between a poet and her poetry. A poet creates a new reality through language, and that new reality is an intimate, faithful and beloved expression of the poet's heart. And so creation is an intimate, faithful and beloved expression of God's heart. God does not create as a manufacturer, mass-producing objects that are quickly gone from her mind; God creates a vulnerable partner, an intimate expression of his being to live in relation to him: Creation.

Lockdown has enabled some of us to reconnect with this primal rhythm of life. We've talked of a slower rhythm... A rhythm that carries with it a sense of innate goodness, of loving relationship and of intimate connection.

And although all creation is good and blessed and loved by the poet-creator, God made humanity in God's own image and likeness. God creates people as signs of his benevolent love and care, given responsibility to rule over nature, meaning, to care for it, like a forester caring for a forest, like a shepherd caring for the sheep. Rampant exploitation careless of the health of nature is far from God's intent for humans.

God makes people as sexual beings. Our desire for one another is no surprise to him, but a part of the world's natural goodness. The rhythm of sex and procreation is a part of God's design.

And God blesses humanity - but his blessing is not an unseen ethereal spiritual blessing; rather, this world is the realm and the content of blessing. People are blessed to have the animals and the birds and the plants and the trees and the fruit and the vegetables... This lovely world IS the blessing of God.

Rhythm is key to spirituality. Life's innate rhythms are the framework on which worship and devotion naturally hang.

Our days and nights may reflect this rhythm... There is evening and there is morning and then, the next day. But in that evening we too can look back on God's creative activity, and on our own, and say, it was good! That aubergine lasagne I made... It was good... That lesson I taught... It was good... That raised flower bed I built... It was good... That walk I took with my dog... It was good... And it is evening and then morning... the next day.

We have the annual rhythm of the seasons linked to religious festivals. A season of reflection and waiting in Lent and Advent; of high celebration at Easter and Christmas; of soul-searching in Passion week; of gratitude at Harvest time.

We have the daily rhythm of our meals. For spiritual people, these are natural moments to express gratitude. Some may say a spoken grace, but an alternative is simply to pause as we take each meal, and to feel gratitude to God, to creation and to our fellow humans who have enabled this food to reach our plates.

We even have the rhythm of our breath. Many religious traditions, including contemplative Christianity, teach the use of the breath as a way of staying tethered to God. In a typical time of contemplative prayer, for twenty minutes or so we can link a Bible verse to our breathing, saying, for example, God is Good with each breath. If we do that, our very breathing becomes a way in which our body prays even when our mind forgets. And when we find ourselves in a queue or at a loose end or in a stressful situation, our prayer phrase can easily return as we notice our breath.

I am glad to say I am unaware of my heart beat, but some people sense their heart beating away at 70 beats per minute or whatever. We associate the heart with love. I wonder, if you are aware of your heart beat, can you find a way of linking that awareness with a sense of the goodness of God, whose heart beats with love for you?

Well now, how are you doing with my quiz questions?

First of all the Etruscan shrew's heart rate is around 1200 per minute, and can be as much as 1500.

And the Blue Whale's heart beat, when diving, can be as low as 4 - 8 times per minute.

Perhaps during this time some of us have learnt to be more Blue Whale and a bit less Etruscan shrew. This slowing down might lead us to rush rather less.

But what should we do with our slower lives, if that's what we have found? Is it time for us to listen more deeply? To understand the world through the eyes of others. To be more humble.

Last Sunday people in Bristol took the statue of slave trader Colston and dropped it into the river. People felt rushed to make a judgement on this action. Was it a criminal act that should be punished? Or was it a long-overdue prophetic declaration against an unfitting commemoration of the evil of slavery?

In the ancient world, an emperor might place statues of himself in far-flung corners of his empire to remind the locals who was in charge. Some say that, in the creation story, human beings are given the same role, but they represent God. People, as they populate the living world, were to be little avatars of God - ambassadors of God - expressing God's benevolent rule and care. That's what it meant to be made in his image.

One of the benefits of a slower and deeper rhythm to life is the ability to simply observe and experience an event without rushing to judgment. Contemplation, unlike twitter, has been called 'a long loving look at the real'.

A slower life is more likely to take this long, loving look at the real. To watch the people drop the slaver's image in the water and to take time to understand this action, and to interpret it with compassion, anger, wisdom and justice.

The statue was an image of an image of God. Perhaps we reach this conclusion: the slave trade that made Bristol prosperous is such an affront to God that we can only rejoice when it is no longer celebrated. Perhaps we learn that we must listen to the anger of people as they confront the evil of racial prejudice.

The Windrush scandal has been depicted this week on the BBC, with a drama exploring how one man who had lived here for 50 years faced deportation because of problems with his paperwork.

The killing of George Floyd in America by a police officer with his knee on Floyd's neck has outraged the world. George Floyd was made in the image of God. I wonder how fast his heart was beating in those last few minutes of his life.

To slow down, and to know that we are part of God's creation, and to wonder that we are made in his image, and to receive the call to steward the earth, is a thing to reality to ponder long. Does British society still discriminate against black people? Is it much easier to get a great job if your name is David Sutcliffe and not Jehan Mahdubala? What, (I might ask as a white man), what am I not seeing? How is my privilege making me blind?

As we engage with the rhythm of life again, perhaps we will be able to sense it. Perhaps God will give us the humility we need to know how we need to be to make this world fairer.

It takes time for the yeast to work all through the dough. It takes time for a mustard seed to grow into a tree. It takes time for God's kingdom to grow in our hearts and in the world around us.

So take time... Develop your sense of rhythm.

Song (WT 386)

*Teach me to dance to the beat of your heart
Teach me to move in the power of your Spirit
Teach me to walk in the light of your presence
Teach me to dance to the beat of your heart*

*Teach me to love with your heart of compassion
Teach me to trust in the word of your promise
Teach me to hope in the day of your coming
Teach me to dance to the beat of your heart*

You wrote the rhythm of life
Created heaven and earth
In You is joy without measure
So, like a child in your sight
I dance to see your delight
For I was made for your pleasure, pleasure

Let all my movements express
A heart that loves to say 'yes'
A will that leaps to obey you
Let all my energy blaze
To see the joy in your face
Let my whole being praise you, praise you

The Grace

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ;
the love of God;
and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit
be with us all
now and always. 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.

Genesis 1:1 - 2:3 background notes

mostly drawn from Walter Brueggemann's Interpretation commentary on Genesis

In Genesis we learn that God calls the world into being and God calls a special community to be his witness. Genesis has a theological focus on **promise**. Each text is an invitation to faithfulness. Will God be faithful? Will creation be faithful? Will the community be faithful?

The first 11 chapters of Genesis are foundational in scripture. To read them well we need to be aware of the genre, style and character of the text we use. The creation stories steer clear of these two extremes:

- A mythological approach which says that only the activities of the gods matter.
- A 'scientific' approach which denies a transcendent creator.

So the creation is significant in its own right, but it stems from the activity of the Creator. So creation (and therefore life) finds its ultimate validity in the heart of the Creator, but the world is positively valued by God in its own right. The revelation of Genesis is dialectical - meaning it holds these two truths in tension with each other, and neither has the entire truth on its own. The creation comes from God and is called into covenant with God - yet it has freedom to respond in various ways.

The first creation narrative we read today is theorised to have been written during the exile, a time of despair, and seeks to bring comfort into that situation. Paul's writings about creation being brought together as a unity (see Ephesians 1:9-10 or Colossians 2: 16 - 17) are a reflection on the nature of creation. Creation is no accident. It is no casual by-product, but an expression of God's noble intent to bring everything into unity, and to make everything part of a good and beautiful whole. The story is not intended to be a scientific description of how the universe began, but a poetic reflection on the nature of creation in relation to God.

In Genesis 1, God creates by speaking. God calls the world into being! Its effect is non-negotiable - yet creatures often do not heed his call. This call is evocative rather than coercive, invitational rather than controlling. God creates with a voice of love. The creation is not an object like a table made by a carpenter. It is a vulnerable partner whose life is defined by the tenderness and wisdom of the one who made her.

God and God's creation are bound together in a distinctive and delicate way, as Brueggemann puts it. Out of chaos, God creates serenity, joy and rest under the benevolent care of the Creator.

1:1 suggests God created out of nothing.

1:2 suggests God created out of chaos - or formlessness.

Both of these convey truth in our lives. God continues to create out of the chaos we find ourselves in. God could create good things out of the chaos of exile. And yet God created everything that is, out of nothing. Even when we are empty, God can still create.

1:22 has God blessing the birds of the air and the fish of the sea - before land animals and people had been made. Blessing is not just for humans.

Later, when humanity is blessed, this is not in an other-worldly denial of creation. It's not a 'spiritual' blessing of some unseen inner favour - it's a blessing through a thorough enjoyment of the good things the earth has to offer. (Verse 28 - 30.)

God repeatedly looks at what he has made, and when he looks he sees that it is good. The whole ensemble is seen as being 'very good' (verse 31).

Humanity is called to rule over the created order. Within the biblical tradition this implies the benevolent care of a shepherd or a forester, managing creation to ensure its survival and fruitfulness.

Humanity is made in God's image. During exile, the Jews saw many images of babyonian gods and stressed that their God could not be imaged on that way. But there is this one exception: humanity **does** image God. Both individuals and community bear the image of God. This has been compared with the habit of kings to leave statues of themselves in places where they were absent - reminding locals of who was in charge. People are intended, then, to remind creation of its beloved status as belonging to our heavenly King.

God's work was not feverish or coercive, but invitational. And, on the seventh day, God's rest is not from exhaustion but an experience of serenity and peace. And so, Sabbath was instituted, to discourage frenetic, feverish self-securing and to encourage peace and rest, and to express a trust in the provision of God. Sabbath is the end of grasping and exploitation.