

## Order of Service 11<sup>th</sup> September 2022

### ***Changing Room***

#### Welcome

Hello, and welcome to *Hearsall at Home* for 11th September 2022. Today we consider the theme of **penitence** - of changing from that which is bad to that which is good.

#### Call to Worship

Colossians 3 includes a list of sins such as malice, immorality, slander and greed; but goes on to describe the lovely and positive characteristics of God's chosen people. We are to put these qualities on like beautiful new clothes. Clearly the Bible thinks that there's room for change; if you like, a holy **changing room**. Here are those new clothes:

*12 Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. 13 Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. 14 And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.*

Colossians 3: 12 - 14

We see in our mind's eye that we put on all these beautiful garments - compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, patience, forbearance and forgiveness - and then, as a magnificent overgarment for all the world to see, we put on love.

We sing of the total compassion and boundless love that makes us whole - changes us into what is good - in our opening hymn, *Love divine*....

#### Hymn (BPW 559) **Love Divine, All Loves Excelling**

1. Love divine, all loves excelling,  
Joy of Heav'n to earth come down;  
Fix in us thy humble dwelling;  
All thy faithful mercies crown!

Jesus, Thou art all compassion,  
Pure unbounded love Thou art;  
Visit us with Thy salvation,  
Enter every trembling heart.

2. Come, Almighty to deliver,  
Let us all Thy grace receive;  
Suddenly return, and never,  
Never more Thy temples leave.  
Thee we would be always blessing,  
Serve Thee as Thy hosts above,  
Pray and praise Thee without ceasing,  
Glory in Thy perfect love.

3. Finish, then, Thy new creation;  
Pure and spotless let us be;  
Let us see Thy great salvation  
Perfectly restored in Thee;  
Changed from glory into glory,  
Till in Heav'n we take our place,  
Till we cast our crowns before Thee,  
Lost in wonder, love, and praise.

Let's say the words of Psalm 51: 1 - 10 together. Later we'll be exploring their meaning in detail.

### Communal Reading

1 Have mercy on me, O God,  
according to your unfailing love;  
according to your great compassion  
blot out my transgressions.

2 Wash away all my iniquity  
and cleanse me from my sin.

3 For I know my transgressions,

and my sin is always before me.  
4 Against you, you only, have I sinned  
and done what is evil in your sight;  
so you are right in your verdict  
and justified when you judge.  
5 Surely I was sinful at birth,  
sinful from the time my mother conceived me.  
6 Yet you desired faithfulness even in the womb;  
you taught me wisdom in that secret place.  
  
7 Cleanse me with hyssop, and I shall be clean;  
wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.  
8 Let me hear joy and gladness;  
let the bones you have crushed rejoice.  
9 Hide your face from my sins  
and blot out all my iniquity.  
  
10 Create in me a pure heart, O God,  
and renew a steadfast spirit within me.

Psalm 51: 1 - 10

### Prayer

Heavenly Father, we have prayed together in the ancient words of a Psalm. We share this ancient confession, for we too have sinned; we, too, have done what is evil in your sight. We throw ourselves on the grace of our mighty Saviour Jesus, who came into the world to save sinners. We rely on your mercy, great compassion and unfailing love. Cleanse us, O Lord. Grant that we once more may rejoice with unfettered joy and may praise you with pure and simple hearts.

We declare your greatness and wonder. You are the wellspring of life, the definition of truth, the friend who sticks closer than a brother, the rescuer of the lost, and the inspiration behind all that is courageous and merciful, righteous and wise, just and fair. We receive once more your forgiveness, and we pray, recreate our hearts and grant us a steadfast spirit to sustain us. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. 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.

What kind of love does God have for us? asks our next song. Jesus, the man above all men, died for our sins. What kind of man is this, that died in agony? He who had done no wrong was crucified for me. What kind of man is this, who laid aside his throne that I may know the love of God? What kind of man is this?

## Song (WT 461) **What Kind of Love is this?**

Verse 1

What kind of love is this  
That gave itself for me?  
I am the guilty one,  
Yet I go free.  
What kind of love is this?  
A love I've never known;  
I didn't even know His name.  
What kind of love is this?

## Verse 2

What kind of man is this  
That died in agony?  
He who had done no wrong  
Was crucified for me.  
What kind of man is this  
Who laid aside His throne  
That I may know the love of God?  
What kind of man is this?

## Verse 3

By grace I have been saved;  
It is the gift of God.  
He destined me to be His son,  
Such is His love.  
No eye has ever seen,  
No ear has ever heard  
Nor has the heart of man conceived;  
What kind of love is this?

## Offering

Lord, for your generosity towards us we are forever grateful. Receive now the offerings we make to church and charity and use them all to let your light shine in this dark world. Amen.

And this week Peter Fearn leads our prayers of intercession.

## Prayers of Intercession

Loving Heavenly Father,

As you look upon our church family assembled here and online, we thank you for the opportunity to worship together. Thank you for the love that unites us, for the peace we enjoy today and for the hopes we have for tomorrow. We thank you too for the health we enjoy, for the work that keeps us occupied, for the food that sustains us,

for the beauty around us that brings joy to our lives and for our friends in every corner of the world.

Lord, we ask you to guide your church at Hearsall as we seek to glorify you and grow in grace. We thank you for David's ministry and the work of the deaconate. We pray for the continuation of their faithful endeavours and that others may feel the calling to the office of Deacon of this church. May we recognise the hopes and aspirations of every member of our fellowship as we move forward in our plans for the future.

Creator God, in this uncertain time politically for our nation, as a change of Prime Minister and the tensions in Parliament dominate the headlines, we pray for the new Prime Minister, Government and all party leaders as they negotiate the political future of the nation. We pray for those who represent our communities in Parliament; for the media as they interpret events, and for ourselves and our future under a new Prime Minister.

Gracious God, sometimes life seems out of control, and we don't know exactly which direction to take, especially when we are, or someone we know is ill. Thank you for overseeing our lives and prompting us in the right way through your word and your spirit. We raise before you now those on our prayer chain and prayer book and those who are causing us concern.

**And now in the quiet of your presence, we each bring to you our own personal concerns for others.**

Father God, help us to recognise the people who need someone to stand up for them. Forgive us for thinking that it's "not our problem" and help us always to be guided by your example and show Christ-like love for all.

Ever-loving Father, we raise before you all those in the world who are suffering, whether it be through war, flood, famine, drought, climate control issues, inequality. We thank you for the work done by the aid agencies around the world and seek to involve ourselves in whichever way we can in supporting them.

Faithful God, thankfulness for all you will do in the future, and we thank you for today and all your we praise you for all you have done in the past, we look forward with

blessings we experience.

Merciful Father,

accept these prayers for the sake of your Son, our Saviour Jesus Christ.

Amen.

Our message this week is largely based on Psalm 51: 1-10, which we've already read together. Now we also hear two related readings from the New Testament.

### Bible Readings

#### **1 Timothy 1: 12 – 17**

##### *The Lord's grace to Paul*

<sup>12</sup> I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has given me strength, that he considered me trustworthy, appointing me to his service. <sup>13</sup> Even though I was once a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent man, I was shown mercy because I acted in ignorance and unbelief. <sup>14</sup> The grace of our Lord was poured out on me abundantly, along with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus.

<sup>15</sup> Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners – of whom I am the worst. <sup>16</sup> But for that very reason I was shown mercy so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display his immense patience as an example for those who would believe in him and receive eternal life. <sup>17</sup> Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honour and glory for ever and ever. Amen.

#### **Luke 15: 1 - 10**

<sup>15</sup> Now the tax collectors and sinners were all gathering round to hear Jesus. <sup>2</sup> But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttered, 'This man welcomes sinners, and eats with them.'

<sup>3</sup> Then Jesus told them this parable: <sup>4</sup> 'Suppose one of you has a hundred sheep and loses one of them. Doesn't he leave the ninety-nine in the open country and go after the lost sheep until he finds it? <sup>5</sup> And when he finds it, he joyfully puts it on his shoulders <sup>6</sup> and goes home. Then he calls his friends and neighbours together and

says, "Rejoice with me; I have found my lost sheep." <sup>7</sup> I tell you that in the same way there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous people who do not need to repent.

<sup>8</sup> 'Or suppose a woman has ten silver coins and loses one. Doesn't she light a lamp, sweep the house and search carefully until she finds it? <sup>9</sup> And when she finds it, she calls her friends and neighbours together and says, "Rejoice with me; I have found my lost coin." <sup>10</sup> In the same way, I tell you, there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.'

Let's sing that powerful hymn reminding us of the basis of our salvation: In Christ alone.

### **Song In Christ Alone my Hope is Found**

In Christ alone my hope is found,  
He is my light, my strength, my song.  
This Cornerstone, this solid ground,  
Firm through the fiercest drought and storm.  
What heights of love, what depths of peace,  
When fears are stilled, when strivings cease.  
My Comforter, my All in All,  
Here in the love of Christ I stand.

In Christ alone! - who took on flesh,  
Fullness of God in helpless babe.  
This gift of love and righteousness,  
Scorned by the ones He came to save.  
Till on that cross, as Jesus died,  
All talk of wrath was laid aside,  
For every sin on Him was laid.  
Here in the death of Christ I live.



There in the ground His body lay,  
Light of the world by darkness slain,  
Then bursting forth in glorious day  
Up from the grave He rose again.  
And as He stands in victory  
Sin's curse has lost its grip on me,  
For I am His and He is mine,  
Bought with the precious blood of Christ.

No guilt in life, no fear in death,  
This is the power of Christ in me.  
From life's first cry to final breath,  
Jesus commands my destiny.  
No power of hell, no scheme of man,  
Can ever pluck me from His hand,  
Till He returns or calls me home  
Here in the power of Christ I'll stand.

Lord, speak through my humble words to encourage and challenge us all, as you see fit. Amen.

### Sermon

#### ***Changing Room***

*Sorry seems to be the hardest word...*

What do our Bible readings teach us about being sorry when we've gone wrong?

Let's look at Psalm 51 in a little detail.

#### The Superscription

*For the director of music. A psalm of David. When the prophet Nathan came to him after David committed adultery with Bathsheba.*

This is certainly not part of the original Psalm and scholars say it might have been

added many years later. So it's possible that David did indeed write it soon after his adultery with Bathsheba and the subsequent visit of the prophet Nathan to challenge him, as recorded in 2 Samuel 12: - and that it has since been carefully preserved down through the generations until the Psalms were collected into the hymn books of Israel. It's also possible that some later scribe received it as part of the collection traditionally known as David's Psalms, and that this scribe felt it was a good fit for the Bathsheba episode. I don't think there's any harm in reading it as from David; but it's not at all specific when it talks of his sins, so it's a good fit for any serious penitent. And so it has long been regarded as one of the seven penitential Psalms - the others being Psalms 6, 32, 38, 102, 130 and 143.

### Verses 1 and 2

*1 Have mercy on me, O God,  
according to your unfailing love;  
according to your great compassion  
blot out my transgressions.*

*2 Wash away all my iniquity  
and cleanse me from my sin.*

Three qualities of God are named: his mercy, his unfailing love and his great compassion.

**Mercy** refers to a situation where another has power to hurt us in some way but chooses not to do so. In asking for mercy, the penitent is already acknowledging that God has the right to punish him. He has discerned in the character of God a willingness not always to treat him as his sins deserved. In Judaism, in Islam, in many religions and, of course, in Christianity, we all depend on the mercy of God.

**Unfailing love** translates a classic Hebrew word: *hesed*. At its root, *hesed* refers to the power of one to help another, especially when the latter is helpless without the former. It's been translated as God's lovingkindness and is elsewhere in the Bible linked with the hope of forgiveness. God's actions might be regarded as merciful; his very being is filled with *hesed* - with lovingkindness, his unfailing love. The penitent here expresses a confidence that it is in God's very nature to be willing and able to

help those who need him, and, if forgiveness is a barrier to their wellbeing, well then, forgiveness too may be reasonably asked for.

**Compassion** in Hebrew is what's known as a plural intensive of the noun womb. It suggests, then, the tender, encouraging and protective feelings of a mother towards her baby, writ large. It sometimes also alludes to the bowels or the gut as the source of mercy, as we might know in our gut that we care deeply for another. Here we read of God's **great** compassion, so we get a sense here of something like this: *You know how fiercely and deeply a mum cares for her new baby... Well multiply that by a million and that's how God feels in his gut towards the penitent.*

Along with three words for God's character we have three ways of talking about forgiveness here.

**Blot out** my transgressions... The translation is good. It suggests some written record of a misdemeanour being wiped away by a sponge. If my sins have been noted on the teacher's board, well, now the record is being wiped clean and no longer visible.

**Wash away** my iniquity... this is ordinary language used for washing clothes, and the basic meaning of the word was to tread or pummell - recalling the vigorous way clothes were washed in the ancient world. If sin is a stain, the penitent is praying - do whatever it takes to wash this stain away from me! Tread me or pummell me if need be!

**Cleanse me** from my sin. The language here was used in various ways in connection with washing - removing dross from metal; removing sickness from the body; removing unclean items from the temple. It's simply saying take out of me that which is unfitting.

And we also find three expressions for sin here. **Transgressions** refers to wilful, self-assertive defiance of God; to rebel against God's reign; revolt against his authority. Also, the ideas of deviating and straying from the right path are conveyed. **Iniquity** - at its root suggests bent down, but possibly also, straying from the path, twisted, twisted away from what is right. Again, the word suggests deliberate action against what the penitent knows to be right and wholesome. **Sin** - this famous biblical word has the root idea of missing the mark, failing, getting it wrong, and

again, usually with deliberate intention. The three words are near synonyms. The penitent is not making excuses. He has freely and wilfully strayed from what is good; his soul is twisted as a consequence.

#### Verses 3 and 4

*3 For I know my transgressions,*

*and my sin is always before me.*

*4 Against you, you only, have I sinned*

*and done what is evil in your sight;*

*so you are right in your verdict*

*and justified when you judge.*

The penitent knows his sin is *always before* him. This suggests a continual personal awareness of his errors, not a formal acknowledgement of sin. He feels his guilt in his bones. Self-awareness, honesty and impartiality are essential prerequisites for true confession.

*Against you only have I sinned...* In the Old Testament **sins against other people were viewed as sins against God**. In Nathan's challenge to David we read this (2 Sam 9) *Why did you despise the word of the Lord by doing what is evil in his eyes? You struck down Uriah the Hittite with the sword and took his wife to be your own. You killed him with the sword of the Ammonites.*

Proverbs 14:31 asserts: *Whoever oppresses the poor shows contempt for their Maker.*

We may think it odd that if a person sins against us, they might declare they have sinned only against God. But this assertion is not intended to minimise guilt but to maximise it. It's not to deflect guilt but to own it. What the scriptures are saying is that if you abuse even the least significant person in the world's eyes, you are abusing God. This is consonant with the teaching of Jesus... *What you did to the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did to me*. So sin is being raised as a most serious matter.

When the penitent says he has *Done what is evil in your sight* - this suggests a wide remit of errors, including what is worthless, corrupt, displeasing, ugly, sad or injurious. Again, the penitent refuses to make excuses, but tells it like it is. He knows what's right and what's wrong. He understands God's teaching on it. And he has chosen to do what was wrong.

### Verse 5

*5 Surely I was sinful at birth,  
sinful from the time my mother conceived me.*

This verse has been used to support the doctrine of original sin, and to suggest that sexual intercourse is inherently sinful. Modern commentators do not take this view, and consider that the idea here is the **essential human condition** of the speaker. Generally speaking, sex in the Bible is something to celebrate. The sin of Adam and Eve in the garden was not that they had sex; they made love later, and conceived Cain. This verse, though, may allude to the Old Testament's notion of ritual uncleanness associated with childbirth, especially a birth resulting from illegitimate sex. But really the verse is read these days as encapsulating the sense that, being born *into* a society of sin, we cannot but become sinners. More profoundly, this verse is expressing that inner feeling most of us have, that the human experience from its earliest consciousness is unavoidably one of sinfulness. There is something about being human that makes it difficult or impossible to live quite in the way we yearn to do. We have been expelled from paradise.

### Verse 6

*Yet you desired faithfulness even in the womb;  
you taught me wisdom in that secret place.*

This verse is harder to interpret. Is it sensible to talk of faithfulness being desired in the womb? What can we mean by a foetus learning wisdom in that secret place? There were traditions of the ancient rabbis which held that an unborn child was presented with the Law, by God. Psalm 139 and other scriptures affirm the presence of God in our life before birth, in our mother's womb. The best interpretation of verse 6 is this: *the penitent is admitting that, at no time in his existence has he been*

*unaware of the righteous requirements of God. Again, he is bulldozing away all sense of excusing himself.*

### Verses 7 - 8

*7 Cleanse me with hyssop, and I shall be clean;  
wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.*

*8 Let me hear joy and gladness;  
let the bones you have crushed rejoice.*

The word for cleanse is literally 'unsin' me! A hyssop brush was used to sprinkle blood at Passover, in rituals for cleansing a leper and in cleansing a person defiled by contact with a corpse. The penitent is using the images of cleansing rituals to pray that he may be clean.

He asks *Wash me and I shall be whiter than snow...* Snow occasionally falls in Palestine, and in Isaiah 1:18 sin is pictured as being scarlet, and sinlessness as snow white. The splash of a crimson stain on a white sheet expresses the penitent's sense of being undeniably and vividly exposed as guilty. Only God can cleanse such a stain.

Verse 8 says, 'Let me hear joy and gladness;' is he here thinking of festival celebrations? Verse 8 in the NEB translation is: *Let the bones dance which you have broken.* The penitent feels broken and severely disabled through his own sin. Yet he asks for the miracle that he will gather and worship in bodily joy with the pilgrims at festival time. Only God can perform this miracle.

### Verses 9 and 10

*9 Hide your face from my sins  
and blot out all my iniquity.*

*10 Create in me a pure heart, O God,  
and renew a steadfast spirit within me.*

Verse 9 continues the prayer of verse 7... The penitent knows that God sees everything, yet he asks for God not to see his sin. Does the all-seeing God consent to be blind to our failings? As Psalm 103 puts it:

*He will not always accuse,  
nor will he harbour his anger for ever;  
10 he does not treat us as our sins deserve  
or repay us according to our iniquities.  
11 For as high as the heavens are above the earth,  
so great is his love for those who fear him;  
12 as far as the east is from the west,  
so far has he removed our transgressions from us.*

Micah 7:19 puts it this way: *You will hurl our iniquities into the depth of the sea.* Only God can see us this way - see us without our failings!

In verse 10 the penitent prays for a pure or a clean heart. The heart was the volitional centre of a person's being. He's praying for a focused motive and steady right intention. He prays for a steadfast spirit meaning a firmly established spirit within him. He's praying for a spiritual backbone. It's unclear, but he may be asking for the Holy Spirit of God.

\* \* \*

The New Testament bears witness to the transforming and saving power of God. The apostle Paul is described as being a blaspheming violent man who persecuted the church. Yet Jesus called him to a pivotal role in salvation history - to be the apostle to the Gentiles.

Jesus' parables describe the divine attitude to those who wander in sin. God longs for the lost person to be found. Jesus' parable of the one hundred sheep depicts the absurd economics of the kingdom of God. Forget the 99 - go and use all your resources to search for the one who is lost. And when they are found, let there be a riotous celebration in the courts of heaven!

\* \* \*

How do you respond to all this today? Do you have any sense of sin in your heart - a sense of not quite being able to live the way you know you should? Perhaps some have a specific sense of sin as a burden or a weight. Perhaps some in the church have lost their way a bit, even as we've tried our best to bounce back after covid.

Perhaps we've made mistakes and hurt each other in our eagerness to rescue the church.

How should we respond? Paul called himself 'the worst of sinners'. David - or the man behind Psalm 51 - made no excuses for his misbehaviour. Both men accepted fully that they were responsible for what had gone wrong in their lives.

There are two aspects that I want to highlight. First, **they focus on their own failings**, not the failings of others. It's not that *she was tempting me*; it's not that *he was provoking me*; it's not that *she ought not to have done that*; it's not that *he didn't really help me when I needed him*. No. A true penitent points the finger in one direction only - firmly into the centre of his own being. Others will have their stories too, but the true penitent simply knows that he must get right with God - and others will follow their own stories.

And secondly, they become so aware of their failings that **they can regard themselves as the worst of sinners**. Why do they do that? Well, their sin is the only sin they can see from the inside. They can see God's loving care from within themselves, and they know they have turned away from the freely-offered love of God. Others may have done worse things in the world's terms, but in spiritual terms they are the soul that has turned away from the mercy, love and truth of God. And, as they gaze back at the unblinking love of God, they sense that they are indeed the worst of sinners, for they have committed the core of **all** sin - to turn away from God.

But what the Psalmist intuited about God is indeed so deeply true. God **can** disregard our sins. He looks upon us with unfailing love and great compassion - like a mother's love magnified beyond comprehension. And, as Christians, we know that this mighty love of God is poured out on us abundantly. For here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.

**So there is room for all to change**. As pastor, I'm suggesting a week of 'room' - a week to ponder and pray over our own need for God's mercy. A week to get more specific with God about why we need his forgiveness. A week of penitence, a week



to focus on our own relationship... a week to take responsibility for our own failings before God.

And next Sunday we will come to this God of great compassion and steadfast love and we will be invited to receive again the bread and wine of holy communion as we remember that his blood can make the foulest clean, and that on the cross Jesus can save the very worst of sinners.

So, to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honour and glory for ever and ever. Amen.

And our closing song reminds us that the core of all true life is in knowing Jesus. All the things we've so often struggled for, fought for, and overvalued is nothing compared with the priceless treasure of our faith. All I once held dear...

**Song (WT 8) **All I Once Held Dear****

All I once held dear built my life upon,  
All this world reveres and wars to own;  
All I once thought gain, I have counted loss;  
Spent and worthless now, compared to this.

*Chorus*

*Knowing you, Jesus, knowing you,  
There is no greater thing:  
You're my all, you're the best,  
You're my joy, my righteousness;  
And I love you, Lord.*

*Now my heart's desire is to know you more,  
To be found in you and known as yours;  
To possess by faith what I could not earn –  
All-surpassing gift of righteousness.*

*Chorus*

Oh, to know the power of your risen life,  
And to know you in your sufferings;  
To become like you in your death, my Lord,  
So with you to live and never die.

#### *Chorus*

*Knowing you, Jesus, knowing you,  
There is no greater thing:  
You're my all, you're the best,  
You're my joy, my righteousness;  
And I love you, Lord.*

#### 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.