

## Order of Service 2<sup>nd</sup> October 2022

### ***The Wonders He Has Shown Us***

#### Welcome

Hello everyone and welcome to Hearsall at home for the second of October 2022.  
Today in our worship we consider the theme of wonder.

#### Call to Worship (read together)

We begin with the noise of Psalm 150. Find the online service sheet and say these words with me.

1 Praise the Lord.

Praise God in his sanctuary;

    praise him in his mighty heavens.

2 Praise him for his acts of power;

    praise him for his surpassing greatness.

3 Praise him with the sounding of the trumpet,

    praise him with the harp and lyre,

4 praise him with tambourine and dancing,

    praise him with the strings and pipe,

5 praise him with the clash of cymbals,

    praise him with resounding cymbals.

6 Let everything that has breath praise the Lord.

Praise the Lord.

We sing a hymn of wonder: *How great thou art!*

#### Hymn (BPW 62) **How Great Thou Art**

1. O Lord my God, when I in awesome wonder  
Consider all the works thy hand hath made,  
I see the stars, I hear the mighty thunder,  
Thy power throughout the universe displayed;

*Chorus*

*Then sings my soul, my Saviour God, to thee,  
How great thou art! How great thou art!*

*Then sings my soul, my Saviour God, to thee,  
How great thou art! How great thou art!*

2. When through the woods and forest glades I wander  
And hear the birds sing sweetly in the trees;  
When I look down from lofty mountain grandeur,  
And hear the brook, and feel the gentle breeze;

*Chorus*

3. And when I think that God his son not sparing,  
Sent him to die - I scarce can take it in,  
That on the cross my burden gladly bearing,  
He bled and died to take away my sin:

*Chorus*

When Christ shall come with shout of acclamation  
And take me home - what joy shall fill my heart!  
Then shall I bow in humble adoration  
And there proclaim, my God, how great thou art!

*Chorus*

### Sharing the Wonders

I invite you to find a notepad or open a file on a device and note down some of the things that you consider to be gateways to wonder. Can you find 3, 4 or 5 things in your recent experience that awaken wonder within you? Why not pause the file now while you do that?

Let us pray.

Loving, transcendent God, we thank you for all in our lives that awakens a sense of wonder within us, whether the stars at night, a newborn child, a faithful friend, a

mountain top view or something else. Such places and such times are holy, for they draw us beyond ourselves into something greater. They woo us more completely into your own majestic presence. Moses was detained by a burning bush. Isaiah was astonished at your presence in the temple. Mary was amazed by the visit of Gabriel. John was astounded by the vision of the risen Christ on the island of exile. But now, in this ordinary place, we wonder at your unfailing love, and we adore you, the Lord of wonders and the revealer of mysteries. 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

We sing the song, *Shout for joy!*

### Song (WT 368) Shout for Joy and Sing

Shout for joy and sing your praises to the King,  
Lift your voice and let your hallelujahs ring.  
Come before his throne to worship and adore,  
Enter joyfully now the presence of the Lord.  
You are my Creator,  
You are my Deliverer,  
You are my Redeemer, you are Lord,

And you are my Healer.  
You are my Provider,  
You are now my Shepherd and my Guide,  
Jesus, Lord and King, I worship you.

### Offering

Lord, we humbly present our gifts to church and charity and ask you to use them to bless our world. Amen.

Our prayers of intercession are led by Cynthia Baker.

### Prayers of Intercession

Today we pray for things happening very close to us but often unseen, unnoticed and unprayed for. In the face of this hidden world, Lord, give us eyes to see and ears to hear.

Somewhere near us, at this moment, someone is ill and struggling to stay alive, someone is struggling to keep their marriage together, someone is struggling to resist a deep, familiar temptation.

Let's pray for them in their struggle.....

Somewhere near us, at this moment, a football match is underway, a couple are enjoying their new baby, a family are planning their holidays, a man is getting out his tools for today's DIY.

Let's pray for them in their relaxation.....

Somewhere near us, at this moment, the air is electric with a family argument, a young person is planning his/her next drug use, a woman with depression is weeping quietly, a man is feeling overwhelmed at the thought of work again on Monday.

Let's pray for them in their dark places.....

Somewhere near us, at this moment, a woman has just finished reading a book that delighted her, someone is working on a wood carving, someone is learning lines for

a play, someone is downloading digital photos of their grandchildren.

Let's pray for them all in their creativity.....

Somewhere near us, at this moment, God the Father is holding the world on course, God the Son is pulling together the wonderful raw material of human lives, God the Holy Spirit is energizing his holy and unholy people.

Somewhere near us, at this moment, and every moment until we're here again next week, God will be lovingly present to every part of his creation, and every person in it. And he'll be struggling with us, and shaping us, he'll be encouraging us and persuading us, he'll be delighting in us and despairing over us. But he'll never give up. And because he's inexhaustible, in the end, he'll always succeed.

Father, help us to trust you with your world, for Jesus' sake.

Amen

Many thanks Cynthia for those prayers. Now back in May, Martin and I wrote a song about sacred spaces, and I reckon it's a good fit for today's theme. Indeed, the whole service that day, 22nd May 2022, is a good complement to today's theme of wonder, as we reflected then on the notion of sacred spaces.

### Song **Sacred Spaces** (Prue/Sutcliffe)

#### Verse 1

In my special places, I sometimes get a sense that he is close;  
In familiar structures, I often feel his love within the stones;  
Or out on misty hillsides, I hear him in an eagle's lonely cry;  
Or with my dearest friends, I'll catch him in a laugh or in a sigh.

#### *Chorus 1*

*So my friends, be careful where you tread.  
This place might not seem so very much to you  
But this is holy ground - this is holy ground.  
My sacred space is here and everywhere,  
So still your busy heart  
For this is holy ground - this is holy ground.*

## Verse 2

The very earth is sacred and everything there is belongs to him.  
Everywhere are holy mountains; birds and stars adore him too,  
Yet he knows my heart, how I need a place for he and I to meet,  
So here I rest before him - in my sacred space he makes my soul complete.

## *Chorus 2*

*So now, my Lord, I sink beneath your gaze  
And worship you in spirit and in truth,  
For this is holy ground - this is holy ground.  
Your sacred space is here and everywhere.  
I drop all my pretence  
For this is holy ground - this is holy ground.*

## *Repeat Chorus 2*

We hear now our Bible readings from 1 Thessalonians and from Mark 3.

## Bible Readings

### **1 Thessalonians 5: 12 - 28**

#### *Final instructions*

<sup>12</sup> Now we ask you, brothers and sisters, to acknowledge those who work hard among you, who care for you in the Lord and who admonish you. <sup>13</sup> Hold them in the highest regard in love because of their work. Live in peace with each other. <sup>14</sup> And we urge you, brothers and sisters, warn those who are idle and disruptive, encourage the disheartened, help the weak, be patient with everyone. <sup>15</sup> Make sure that nobody pays back wrong for wrong, but always strive to do what is good for each other and for everyone else.

<sup>16</sup> Rejoice always, <sup>17</sup> pray continually, <sup>18</sup> give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.

<sup>19</sup> Do not quench the Spirit. <sup>20</sup> Do not treat prophecies with contempt <sup>21</sup> but test them all; hold on to what is good, <sup>22</sup> reject every kind of evil.

<sup>23</sup> May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. <sup>24</sup> The one who calls you is faithful, and he will do it.

<sup>25</sup> Brothers and sisters, pray for us. <sup>26</sup> Greet all God's people with a holy kiss. <sup>27</sup> I charge you before the Lord to have this letter read to all the brothers and sisters.

<sup>28</sup> The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you.

### **Mark 3: 7 - 12**

#### *Crowds follow Jesus*

<sup>7</sup> Jesus withdrew with his disciples to the lake, and a large crowd from Galilee followed. <sup>8</sup> When they heard all he was doing, many people came to him from Judea, Jerusalem, Idumea, and the regions across the Jordan and around Tyre and Sidon. <sup>9</sup> Because of the crowd he told his disciples to have a small boat ready for him, to keep the people from crowding him. <sup>10</sup> For he had healed many, so that those with diseases were pushing forward to touch him. <sup>11</sup> Whenever the impure spirits saw him, they fell down before him and cried out, 'You are the Son of God.' <sup>12</sup> But he gave them strict orders not to tell others about him.

The name of Jesus is a wondrous thing. His body is our sacred space. We are his body, as we learnt back in May. Through him we can access God in all the circumstances of life. He takes away our sin, and fills us with his love, gives us a promise of life eternal, and the right to be called God's children. We sing, *How sweet the name of Jesus sounds...*

#### Hymn (BPW 339) **How Sweet the Name of Jesus Sounds**

1. How sweet the name of Jesus sounds  
In a believer's ear!  
It soothes our sorrows, heals our wounds,  
And drives away our fear.
2. It makes the wounded spirit whole,  
And calms the troubled breast;  
It's manna to the hungry soul,  
And to the weary, rest.

3. Dear name! the rock on which I build,  
My shield and hiding-place,  
My never-failing treasury, filled  
With boundless stores of grace.
4. Jesus! my shepherd, brother, friend,  
My prophet, priest, and king;  
My Lord, my life, my way, my end,  
Accept the praise I bring.
5. Weak is the effort of my heart,  
And cold my warmest thought;  
But when I see you as you are,  
I'll praise you as I ought.
6. Till then I would your love proclaim  
With every fleeting breath,  
And may the music of your name  
Refresh my soul in death.

Speak now O Lord, even through my limited words, for your servants are listening.  
Amen.

### Sermon

#### ***The Wonders He Has Shown Us***

So, **what is wonder?** An online dictionary offers this definition: *A feeling of amazement and admiration, caused by something beautiful, remarkable, or unfamiliar.*

**Why is wonder important?** According to Greek philosophy, Iris is the child of Thaumos - that is, wonder (thaumos) gives birth to messages from heaven (iris). Wonder leads us to a curiosity about and an appreciation of the deeper things of God.



In spiritual experience, wonder draws us beyond ourselves. More precisely, it draws us beyond our current understanding of ourselves and our universe, and gives us a taste of something more. We may feel tinier as we grasp the greatness of God or the intricacies of science. So, wonder stimulates appreciation, curiosity, humility and exploration.

### **How do we respond to an experience of wonder?**

On the mountain in the wilderness, Jesus was transfigured by light and spoke with Moses and Elijah. Peter, James and John witnessed all this and then heard the voice of God speaking from heaven. They fell facedown, but Peter, at least, had wanted to explore the experience by building three shelters for the illustrious personages.

Wonder is a complex emotion. It makes us shrink away in awe. It disturbs us. But it also pricks our curiosity. Our mental map of the universe has proved inadequate and some of us, at least, want to find out more.

### **How rare or how common is wonder?**

My hunch is that a small child frequently experiences something akin to wonder as she or he becomes increasingly aware of the world they inhabit. Why do objects fall down instead of up? What's it like to put a sprout in your mouth? What is this four-legged furry thing spinning around the lounge with a wagging tail?

But then we fit gravity, vegetables and dogs into our understanding of reality. They cease to amaze us. They have become predictable and manageable. So it might be true that many adults feel wonder only rarely. When did you last feel it? Would you like to feel it more?

### **Is it possible to lose a sense of wonder altogether?**

It's certainly possible for our *openness to wonder* to diminish and almost vanish. A newly-married man feels wonder when he awakes to find his wife by his side in the morning. A man married for decades can either let that sense of wonder wither on the vine or cultivate it and remember daily how wonderful his wife is. If he thinks he completely understands his wife, and can predict her every word and deed, there is nothing to wonder about. But if he accepts her as an ever-unfolding mystery, he may always delight to find her so close. Or imagine a person who buys a house by a river. To begin with, she is entranced by the changing moods of the water flowing past her.

But in time, it may become effectively invisible to her. She no longer really feels it as she walks along its bank on her way to work. Or maybe she cultivates her sense of wonder, and her delight in the varying colours of the water never leaves her behind.

### **Does it matter if we lose our sense of wonder?**

Well, what's the opposite of finding a person or a thing wonderful? It might be *taking them for granted*. If a person takes their lover for granted, this is the route to a failed relationship. To take someone for granted means that we could replace them with our understanding of them. We could programme a robot to play their part and not really notice the difference. Whereas in a living relationship, we treasure the *otherness* of a lover who is still able to surprise us, entrance us, upset us, confuse us or delight us.

### **Can we lose our sense of spiritual wonder?**

Think about it. I suspect that for wonder *not* to be a part of spirituality reveals the death of that spirituality. If church life is reduced to rotas, musical choices, finances and administration, then we are in deep trouble. Spirituality, for Christians at least, is about encountering God: the Lord God King of the Universe. If we take him for granted, we have replaced the living God with our own idea of God. God has been replaced by theology. I have been part of churches where songs are repeated endlessly. Wonder becomes a casualty of repetition. I have been in churches where it would be hard to discern any difference between the way the church operates and some secular operation. If in a relationship with a lover, the potential for surprise, entrancement, confusion or disturbance are essential for that relationship to be life-enhancing, well, how much more would this apply to a relationship with the ultimate mystery of God himself?

### **But is this a particular problem for Christianity?**

Yes it is. We are told that the Son is the exact representation of Father God in Hebrews 1:3. One way we might understand that is that in the brief accounts of Jesus we have in the gospels we can find every little thing there is to know about God. We have God taped, almost literally. That is muddle-headed for any number of reasons. First of all, Jesus' earthly life was vastly greater than the selective account of the few years recorded in the gospels. As John put it, if everything were recorded, the whole world wouldn't be able to hold all the books needed. (Mind you, John

hadn't heard of microchips.) Secondly, we understand that the Son has existed with the Father before time itself began. If there are infinitely many parallel universes, as some physicists suggest, then there is infinitely more to know about the life of God the Father and God the Son and, indeed, God the Holy Spirit. And thirdly, the man Jesus was showing one human life, in one culture, one time and one place, whilst fully devoted to God. What would such a life look like today? Jesus, as far as we know, never took an exam, never made love, never held a political office, never went for a job interview... Jesus the man never caught a plane, worked through transgender issues, struggled with differential calculus, learned Spanish, drove a car, played cricket, or for that matter had a period... There is infinitely more to discover about a life devoted to God in **our** time, **our** place, **our** culture... **our** work, **our** neighbours, **our** family, **our** church... If we have no sense of wonder, then our religious activities are hollow indeed.

Jesus, in our gospel reading, had withdrawn with his disciples. They needed time to experience the wonder of the identity of the man they were following. But wonder was crowded out by hordes of people following him, people coming from far and near. People were pushing and shoving in their eagerness to get to Jesus. The impure spirits identified Jesus and cried out that he is the Son of God. He told the spirit **not** to tell others about him. This is a repeated theme in Mark's gospel. For example, in 8:36, Jesus commanded a crowd not to tell anyone how he had healed a man who had been unable to hear or speak. But the more he told them not to talk, the more they kept talking about him.

There is a sort of wonder, I suppose, in a spectacular physical healing or in a crowd of people excitedly jostling to get to Jesus. But real wonder comes through contemplating Jesus more quietly in the ordinary. If God is found only in the extraordinary, that would be odd, as if God could only be found in situations where the laws of the universe God had set up were not being followed. True wonder is found by contemplating life and God in the ordinary. But we need to take time out to grasp that. After our gospel reading, Jesus goes on a retreat up a mountain and there he calls to himself the disciples.

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Let's now look at our reading from 1 Thessalonians 5.

*Acknowledge those who work hard among you and who admonish you. A church should show great respect to those who are the grafters... They should not be taken for granted... The faithful saints who get on and do the stuff that needs doing should be honoured. Their service is inspiring and exemplary, and a church should *hold them in the highest regard in love because of their work.**

We should deeply respect and we should love these people among us. They are a source of wonder.

*Live in peace with each other. Warn those who are idle and disruptive. Sometimes people who are displaying an unhelpful attitude may need to be drawn aside and invited to reflect. Perhaps we begin with a deep attempt to understand *why* a person is presenting a fellowship with awkward behaviours, but a church may need the guts too, to simply challenge one who is being unloving, unkind, ungracious, or generally unChristian in their behaviour. Living in peace with one another is not always about brushing sin under the carpet. The courage to challenge well is a source of wonder.*

*Encourage the disheartened, help the weak, be patient with everyone...* These are the key notes of true Christian fellowship. Encouragement, help, patience when we need it. Christ's church welcomes all kinds of people through her door: the broken, the weak, the strong, the whole, the smug, the humble, the kind, and the difficult ones whom no one else will have... But with encouragement, patience and assistance, most people can begin to be transformed into the glorious likeness of Christ. A church being such a loving, transformative community is a source of wonder.

*Make sure that nobody pays back wrong for wrong, but always strive to do what is good for each other and for everyone else.* This is agape love in action. In the world we expect people to give us good as they get, which means to give as bad as they get. One person does a bad thing to another. In response, a bad thing is returned. This doubles the amount of badness in the world. In the church, we return good behaviour for bad. As Paul put it in another letter, *don't be overcome by evil, rather overcome evil with good.* In the church community, and in the church community's

interaction with the outside world, we always aim for what is good. The practice of such behaviour is another source of wonder.

*Rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances.* To rejoice always may sometimes be insensitive. We don't rejoice with a newly-bereaved family, to give an obvious example. But in a profound sense, we always do rejoice, and there is a light of joy that is never extinguished, because Christ has won the victory and there will be no more death, no more sorrow, no more suffering, for the Lord God himself will wipe away every tear. Such deep joy gives us strength and courage through the challenges of life.

To pray continually can be a tall order. Some interpret this as an invitation to be forever chatting to God in their hearts, which is fine, though it can be tricky if one's attention is required for a complex task. Others read this as a way of being silently and centrally connected with God, so that our words and deeds themselves become an expression of continual prayer.

To *give thanks in all circumstances* is one of Christianity's numerous gifts to the world. The practice of gratitude is now fashionable in pop psychology, but it has been a staple of Christian spirituality for two thousand years, and of Jewish spirituality for many centuries before then. In the western world, only an entirely self-focused person, or a sick person, is unable to find anything for which to be thankful. We thank God daily for the essentials of life, like food, water and sunshine; we thank him for the social aspects of life like friends, family and animal companions; we thank him for the beauty of life that we can see in a house plant or a rainbow; we thank God for the great mystery of the salvation won for humanity by Christ on the cross. An attitude of perpetual gratitude is a source of spiritual, emotional and even physical health.

*Rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances.* This is a wonder-filled way of life.

*Do not quench the Spirit.* The Spirit here refers to the Holy Spirit in the heart and life of the believer and in the heart and life of the church community. This teaching is

showing us that Paul believed that God, as the Holy Spirit, was interested, curious and active within the regular life of a local church.

*Do not treat prophecies with contempt but test them all...* This suggests that, in the regular life of the early church, it was not uncommon for individuals to speak in the name of God. Clearly some such messages were being dismissed as false. Paul instructs the church to treat them seriously and to consider whether or not they may indeed express God's message in their particular situation.

So, the Thessalonian church was one in which God spoke messages and the Spirit of God was active in real, disruptive and constructive ways in the church's week to week activities. This is a source of wonder.

The proximity of God to the believer is emphasised again: *May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. The one who calls you is faithful, and he will do it.*

Our life stories are not to be reduced to a biologist's life-cycle of birth, mating and death. In the business of living, loving and dying, we are sanctified - that is made holy. We are kept blameless by God as our sins are forgiven and we learn how to live well. To live our lives under the shadow of his wing, to die knowing we are ascending to our Lord who comes to us - these are wonderful experiences. Life is a source of wonder for the attentive Christian. And the one who calls you is faithful, and he will do it.

\* \* \*

Our particular little church is under great stress from dilapidated buildings, skyrocketing energy prices and an understandable reluctance to respond to God's call to lead in difficult times. But we should never lose sight of the fact that little Hearsall is also a thing of wonder - a place of kindness, unconditional love, open-minded gospel and warm mutual affection. This wondrous thing is what drew me to minister here, and it has drawn many of us into its fellowship of love. The wonder is seen in ordinary things like people cleaning when no one else is looking and turning up for meetings when we are over-tired. The wonder of Hearsall is felt as we share

Holy Communion or even simply chat over refreshments. Let us treasure these wonders.

But let us also be open to the wonders of the Spirit speaking through one another words of wisdom and hope. Let us ponder the Bible's pages in our own devotions and be open to words coming alive on the page. Let us share such messages with each other. Dare we believe that God will guide us together as we wait on him in prayer? Wouldn't that be rather wonderful?

It's also wonderful to be creative. We close with another song written by Martin and me: *When your pure light shines...*

Song (WT 454) **When Your Pure Light Shines**

When your pure light shines  
so brightly in our world,  
I see the colours change  
from greyness into glory.  
Our hearts, like coloured glass  
that were so dark and dusty,  
turn radiant and lovely  
in the glory of your light.

*Chorus x 2*

*Shine within my heart!*

*Shine within your church!*

*Shine ever brighter in your world!*

The broken and the lonely  
are welcome in your church;  
the hungry ones are fed  
and migrants treated kindly;  
slaves at last are freed,  
the unemployed find work,  
and mourners relearn gladness  
in the family of God.

*Chorus x 2*

*Shine within my heart!*

*Shine within your church!*

*Shine ever brighter in your world!*

*Ending:*

*Shine ever brighter,*

*Shine ever brighter,*

*Shine ever brighter in your world.*

### 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.