

Order of Service for 30th October 2022

Scarlet and White

Welcome

Hello and welcome to Hearsall at Home for 30th October 2022. Our service today is called *Scarlet and White*, as we reflect on the importance of seeking God's help to change.

Call to Worship

Paul prayed for the Thessalonians to more and more live their lives in line with God's calling...

With this in mind, we constantly pray for you, that our God may make you worthy of his calling, and that by his power he may bring to fruition your every desire for goodness and your every deed prompted by faith. We pray this so that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you, and you in him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ.

2 Thessalonians 1:11-12

Our opening hymn is, *Sing to God new songs of worship...*

Hymn (WT372) **Sing to God New Songs of Worship**

Sing to God new songs of worship:
all his deeds are marvellous;
he has brought salvation to us
with his hand and holy arm:
he has shown to all the nations
righteousness and saving power;
he recalled his truth and mercy
to his people Israel.

Sing to God new songs of worship:
Earth has seen his victory;
let the lands of Earth be joyful,
praising him with thankfulness:
sound upon the harp his praises,
play to him with melody;
let the trumpets sound his triumph,
show your joy to God the King!

Sing to God new songs of worship:
let the sea now make a noise;
all on Earth and in the waters
sound your praises to the Lord:
let the hills be joyful together,
let the rivers clap their hands,
for with righteousness and justice
he will come to judge the Earth.

Prayer of Confession

We hear in our prayers some words from Psalm 32.

Blessed is the one whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered.
Blessed is the one whose sin the Lord does not count against them and in whose
spirit is no deceit. When I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning
all day long. For day and night your hand was heavy on me; my strength was sapped
as in the heat of summer. Then I acknowledged my sin to you and did not cover up
my iniquity. I said, 'I will confess my transgressions to the Lord.' And you forgave the
guilt of my sin. Therefore let all the faithful pray to you while you may be found;
surely the rising of the mighty waters will not reach them. You are my hiding-place;
you will protect me from trouble and surround me with songs of deliverance.

Psalm 32:1-7

Loving Lord, we do indeed acknowledge our sins before you. We do not always live
up to our faith. We can give the impression we are more righteous than we in fact
are. We feel the pain of our failure, and we cry out to you for mercy.

We know that if we say we are without sin, we are only fooling ourselves and speaking a lie. And so we confess our sins and look to you, in your righteousness and in your mercy, to forgive us. We receive your forgiveness even now.

And as we do so, we praise and bless you for your goodness, greatness, holiness, majesty, mercy, kindness and love. We hide ourselves in you and sing and surround ourselves with those songs of deliverance. Hallelujah. Amen.

The Lord's Prayer

Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those who sin against us.
Lead us not into temptation
but deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power,
and the glory are yours
now and for ever.
Amen.

Offering

We reflect on our offering.

Lord, for your generous gifts to us we give you our thanks and now we offer to you our own humble gifts and ask that you use them to bless your world. Amen.

Let's share in a couple of worship songs now, seeking for God to reign in us as King and to enfold us in his love,

2 Songs :

Song (WT 358) **Reign in Me**

Reign in me, Sovereign Lord,
Reign in me,
Reign in me, Sovereign Lord,
Reign in me.

Captivate my heart,
Let Your Kingdom come,
Establish there Your throne,
Let Your will be done.

* Repeat from beginning

Reign in me, Sovereign Lord,
Reign in me.

Song (WT 320) **O Let the Son of God enfold you**

O let the Son of God enfold you
with his Spirit and his love;
let him fill your heart and satisfy your soul.
O let him have the things that hold you,
and his Spirit like a dove
will descend upon your life and make you whole.

Jesus, O Jesus, come and fill your lambs.
Jesus, O Jesus, come and fill your lambs.

O come and sing this song with gladness
as your hearts are filled with joy.
Lift your hands in sweet surrender to his name.
O give him all your tears and sadness,
give him all your years of pain,
and you'll enter into life in Jesus' name.

Our prayers of intercession this week come from Sarah Lewis.

Prayers of Intercession.

When I was a Brownie – all those years ago – we had a law which has remained with me ever since: “A Brownie Guide thinks of others before herself and does a good turn every day.” Expanding this, I ask, ‘Can we help to answer our prayers?’ I make some suggestions, but I am sure you can think of more.

Let us pray,

Loving Lord, we bring to you today people across the globe who are facing hardship or destitution. We ask you to make us conduits of your love.

We pray for those living in poverty in our community. In particular, we think of people struggling to put food on the table and for the first time having to use their local foodbank, to which they may previously have contributed. Lord, find it in our hearts, if we are able, to start the Foodbank Advent collection in November, rather than in December.

Of course, we realise that our situation cannot be compared with the on-coming famine we see on the television in Somalia. We ask for your tender love to be with people living with drought, and for those living with floods which, deep down, we are accepting as evidence of global warming. Help us to accept the urgent need to use energy wisely – perhaps reduce our heating thermostat, reduce the use of the tumble drier, walk or use the bus instead of always the car ...

Heavenly Father, support those without a home, those from a refugee camp to people living in B&B accommodation or sofa surfing. Lord, guide our thinking – can we donate just a little? Perhaps we could give to Christian Aid or the Disasters Emergency Committee, or do we have some long-forgotten cooking utensils we could rehome to help a family evicted with little, when they could no longer afford the rent or mortgage – or perhaps we could give to Carriers of Hope.

We pray for our new Prime Minister, Rishi Sunak. We ask that the tough decisions he foresees will be taken with the best interests of people, and mindful of needs. We

thank you, Lord, that although not a Christian, he is a man of faith and ask that this will guide him in his work.

We pray for those standing for election as deacons. Lord, I ask you to give them support.

Lord, please bless the pastoral care work at our church and give strength to those who will work to make it happen.

Lord, there may be days when we worry about what we haven't got – perhaps materially we are struggling. But we all have gifts we can offer; gifts of support, strength, prayer and, of course, we are wealthy whilst we have you as our saviour.

So, Lord, help US to think of others before ourselves and do a good turn every day.

Amen

Many thanks Sarah for those prayers. We hear now our Bible readings from Isaiah and Luke.

Bible Readings

Isaiah 1: 10 - 18

¹⁰ Hear the word of the LORD,
you rulers of Sodom;

listen to the instruction of our God,
you people of Gomorrah!

¹¹ 'The multitude of your sacrifices –
what are they to me?' says the LORD.

'I have more than enough of burnt offerings,
of rams and the fat of fattened animals;

I have no pleasure
in the blood of bulls and lambs and goats.

¹² When you come to appear before me,
who has asked this of you,
this trampling of my courts?

¹³ Stop bringing meaningless offerings!

Your incense is detestable to me.

New Moons, Sabbaths and convocations –

I cannot bear your worthless assemblies.

¹⁴ Your New Moon feasts and your appointed festivals

I hate with all my being.

They have become a burden to me;

I am weary of bearing them.

¹⁵ When you spread out your hands in prayer,

I hide my eyes from you;

even when you offer many prayers,

I am not listening.

Your hands are full of blood!

¹⁶ Wash and make yourselves clean.

Take your evil deeds out of my sight;

stop doing wrong.

¹⁷ Learn to do right; seek justice.

Defend the oppressed.

Take up the cause of the fatherless;

plead the case of the widow.

¹⁸ ‘Come now, let us settle the matter,’

says the LORD.

‘Though your sins are like scarlet,

they shall be as white as snow;

though they are red as crimson,

they shall be like wool.

Luke 19: 1 - 10

Zacchaeus the tax collector

19 Jesus entered Jericho and was passing through. ² A man was there by the name of Zacchaeus; he was a chief tax collector and was wealthy. ³ He wanted to see who Jesus was, but because he was short he could not see over the crowd. ⁴ So he ran

ahead and climbed a sycamore-fig tree to see him, since Jesus was coming that way.

⁵ When Jesus reached the spot, he looked up and said to him, 'Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today.' ⁶ So he came down at once and welcomed him gladly.

⁷ All the people saw this and began to mutter, 'He has gone to be the guest of a sinner.'

⁸ But Zacchaeus stood up and said to the Lord, 'Look, Lord! Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount.'

⁹ Jesus said to him, 'Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham. ¹⁰ For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.'

Jesus' love for us is deep and long and broad and high and seen most powerfully of all as he suffered and died to make us whole. We sing the song, *Come and see...*

Song (WT 60) **Come and See**

Come and see, come and see,
come and see the King of love;
see the purple robe and crown of thorns he wears.
Soldiers mock, rulers sneer,
as he lifts the cruel cross;
lone and friendless now, he climbs towards the hill.

Chorus

*We worship at your feet, where wrath and mercy meet,
and a guilty world is washed by love's pure stream.
For us he was made sin, oh, help me take it in.
Deep wounds of love cry out, 'Father, forgive.'
I worship, I worship the Lamb who was slain.*

Come and weep, come and mourn
for your sin that pierced him there;
so much deeper than the wounds of thorn and nail.
All our pride, all our greed,
all our fallenness and shame;
and the Lord has laid the punishment on him.

Chorus

*We worship at your feet, where wrath and mercy meet,
and a guilty world is washed by love's pure stream.
For us he was made sin, oh, help me take it in.
Deep wounds of love cry out, 'Father, forgive.'
I worship, I worship the Lamb who was slain.*

Man of Heaven, born to Earth
to restore us to your Heaven,
Here we bow in awe beneath your searching eyes.
From your tears comes our joy,
from your death our life shall spring;
by your resurrection power we shall rise.

Chorus

Lord, now speak through the sacred text of the Bible so we may hear your living word into our hearts and lives. Amen.

Sermon

Scarlet and White

Deep Fakes are an increasingly worrying problem. The face of a famous person can be superimposed onto a video of someone behaving in an untoward manner. I guess from the context the fake these days is usually obvious. But as time goes by, it's surely going to get ever more difficult to disentangle a mischievously created Deep Fake from a genuine video.

Frauds have always been with us in some shape or form, I suppose. And perhaps we can all sometimes feel like frauds ourselves. There are different levels to a

person, and the levels don't always align with each other. Take our old friend Zacchaeus. Let's view him at three levels: superficial, critical and loving.

The **superficial level** is perhaps the way the **Romans** looked at him. He was a successful businessman, a pragmatist, who had done well for himself and was a useful cog in the Roman machine, collecting the properly due taxes from Jericho in return for the public benefits of the Empire's rule.

But Zacchaeus was also viewed much more harshly, at a **critical** level, the way his fellow **Jews** looked at him. He was a collaborator with the enemy. He assisted the occupying power of Rome and grew wealthy at the expense of the poor.

If you mix these two levels together, you smell a fake. If Zacchaeus tries to pass himself off as a respectable and successful businessman, well, those who see him critically will call him a fraud. He's **not** respectable. He's a collaborator who cheats his own people and assists the occupation of his country by a foreign power.

But when **Jesus** looks at Zacchaeus up in his sycamore tree, he must have been very well aware of both these ways of seeing this man: he's a high-flying entrepreneur, and he's a traitor to his own people. But Jesus at the same time sees more deeply. He sees at the third level of love. Zacchaeus was a son of Abraham, and he was lost, and he could have been doing so much better with his life.

I recently watched a film about another fraud: twentieth century Dutch artist van Meegeren. He had begun his career by painting legitimate art in the style of the Old Masters but was written off by the critics as being derivative. They loved cubism and surrealism, and here was a man painting partially-lit moody old interiors that had passed out of fashion centuries ago.

So van Meegeren turned his hand to producing copies of Old Masters and then to faking original art, and presenting it as being painted by people like Vermeer centuries before. He took several years to perfect his fraudulent art and craft, and is regarded as one of the greatest forgers in art history.

After the Second World War, he was put on trial for collaborating with the Nazis. A Vermeer painting had been found in Goring's cache of fine art, and it was traced back to van Meegeren. He was fabulously rich, owning several country houses, and

much more property too. Where had the wealth come from? Had he sold a Dutch national treasure to the occupying power to feather his own nest?

There was a post war trial. At the superficial level, van Meegeren was a minor artist and art dealer who had become very wealthy. At a critical level, he was a collaborator, who had cooperated with the despised Nazi regime.

But what was really going on was this: the painting that was the jewel in the crown of Goring's art collection was simply a fake. The trial eventually uncovered this. Van Meegeren had swindled the Nazis and sold them one of his own paintings as if it were by Vermeer himself.

Well, van Meegeren was hardly a good man. He sold fake art to many, including the Dutch government, and was given a one year prison sentence, though he died of a heart attack before beginning it.

I wonder how God looked at him? Perhaps his most famous fake, the one he sold to the Nazis as a Vermeer, gives us a clue. It is called *Christ and the Adulteress*.

A woman, as recorded in John 8, is brought before Jesus to be condemned. At the superficial level, she was a regular wife. At the critical level, she was an adulteress. A fraud. You may recall that Jesus doodles in the sand on the ground, perhaps searching for a way of presenting what he sees: for he sees her with the eyes of holy love.

Perhaps he sees a victim, a woman long manipulated by men; where was her partner in crime, after all? Perhaps he sees a woman who had made a mistake, and needed a second chance. I'm sure he sees a lost daughter of Abraham who was loved by God and could do so much better. Go, and sin no more!

At the critical level, this was a scarlet woman. Let's think for a bit about that word *scarlet*. It crops up several times in the scriptures, and usually it signifies something highly visible or showy: something that cannot be ignored. Scarlet yarn was used in the adornment of the tabernacle and the vestments of the High Priest. And when the children of Israel came to occupy Jericho, they were helped by a woman called Rahab. In return for her help, the conquerors would spare her household, but she must make her special status obvious by hanging a scarlet thread in her window.

In Isaiah chapter 1, we heard of the sins of Israel. Viewed at a superficial level, the worship of the temple was fine and dandy.

The proper sacrifices were made.

The proper rituals were performed.

The proper words were spoken.

Viewed at a critical level, the worship was a fake. Saying nice holy words in worship did not translate into a national commitment to justice and mercy and truth. They were neglecting widows and orphans. A modern parallel would be that those who need to rely on benefits were being ignored. Oppression, injustice and bloodshed were allowed to prosper.

The prophet declares that the fraudulent nature of their worship was extremely obvious to God. Their sins were like **scarlet**. God was not taken in by the superficial level of their worship. God was well aware of the critical way of looking at things.

And yet, viewed with the eyes of the heart, there was hope. The quotation goes on...

*Though your sins are as scarlet **now**,
they **shall be** white as snow.*

Deeper than the fine show of temple worship... Deeper than the charge of injustice that made that worship a fake...

Deeper than all fakes, God sees the potential for change.

This is third level seeing. It is seeing with the eyes of love.

There's one other instance of scarlet in the scriptures that I want to mention. The robe Jesus was made to wear after his own condemnation was a scarlet robe. Of course, he was being condemned as a fake Messiah and mocked as a fake King, but it is interesting that, his body was enrobed in scarlet. The vivid colour of sin.

The showy colour of pride.

The bright colour of blood.

He is clothed with all this, as he is made ready to die on a cross. He takes those sins upon himself: pride, fraud, failure, hypocrisy and all the other evils that live in the human world; and he meekly submits to the punishment others might have deserved.

On the cross, some saw him at a superficial level: a good man subjected to a cruel fate. Some saw him at a critical level: a false Messiah with pretentious ambitions against the Jewish religion, a fake king. But some, like one of the soldiers, saw him as he really was: the Son of God. And the women at the foot of the cross saw him with the eyes of love.

So, how do you look at yourself? In a simple way: an ordinary person leading an ordinary life? In a critical way: as one who has sometimes failed and doesn't always live out their faith as they should? Or can we see ourselves as God most deeply sees us: as his beloved children? If our sins were scarlet, if we are a bit of a muddle, a hypocrite even, can we nevertheless see ourselves as Jesus does? It's my job to tell you that you are a beloved child of God.

But I am not talking about grace that makes no difference here, as if your sin does not matter. Jesus implies that salvation is evidenced by active change. He knows that salvation has come to Zacchaeus' house when he says he'll give away half his possessions to the poor and compensate anyone he might have defrauded, four times over.

Famously in Luke, Jesus meets another wealthy individual, often called the rich young ruler. This man is told by Jesus that he must give away **all** his possessions, then come and follow Jesus. By contrast, it seems that Zacchaeus, in giving away a mere **half** of his possessions, had done enough to prove his faith. Why the difference?

Perhaps it's simply this: Jesus **sees the heart**. Jesus does **not** treat everyone the same. If you study his responses to individuals as recorded in the gospels, you soon realise that he is not following a formula. At a superficial level, both Zacchaeus and the rich young man were successful businessmen. At a critical level, they both might have been written off as uncaring fat cats, rich at the expense of ordinary people.

But Jesus sees them as individuals. Jesus sees what particular things hold a particular person back. An alcoholic may need to follow a strict ban on all booze, whereas another person who has a problem with drink might be able to safely moderate their consumption. Perhaps the rich young ruler's heart was gripped by greed; in contrast Jesus saw that it **was** possible that Zacchaeus could get into the

habit of generously giving to the poor, whilst also retaining some wealth and using it equitably. It's hard to be a wealthy Christian, because managing great resources in a godly way requires constant vigilance against temptation.

But perhaps it can be done. Jesus can get the camel through the eye of the needle. So, Zacchaeus does **not** quit his job as chief tax collector. Maybe he can now hold that position in a responsible way, giving the Romans their due, scrupulously avoiding all over-charging, and sharing his wealth with the poor. Wealth is deceitful my friends, but it **is** possible to be a wealthy follower of Jesus.

Jesus came to seek and save the lost. He's actively looking for the fake, the floundering, the broken. He's even looking for the hypocrites, because they especially need his help.

Zacchaeus' heart is seen by Jesus. Jesus doesn't see a tax collector, or a cheat, or a collaborator, or if he does, that's not all he sees. He sees a son of Abraham with the potential to change. What does he see when he looks at you?

And finally, how do you look at others? Do you see them in a straightforward way, just an ordinary person leading an ordinary life? Do you see them critically, and focus on their failings? We all have them after all.

Or can we have the courage to see them through love's eyes, as sons and daughters of God? Can we see that, even if their sins were as obvious as scarlet, they can be white as snow one day? Can we see that they, too, have the potential to change?

Because if we can't, we risk imprisoning them in our own perceptions, restricting them, even writing them off. Of course, each of the various levels of seeing conveys some truth. But the gospel inspires us to see them **most habitually**, as God sees them, through the eyes of love. And the gospel inspires us to behave towards them in a manner consistent with that seeing. They are the beloved ones, the ones with the potential to change. We don't forget the critical way of seeing. We may need its analysis to help a person to see the consequences of their actions, but we do it gently, and we always especially take time to see them with the eyes of the heart.

Finally, a word about politicians. There's a very lazy tendency to write off all

politicians as cynical liars, who are only in that line of work for their own prestige and wealth.

One of my old friends once had the opportunity of coaching a well-known politician, one who, inevitably, had faced obvious failure and harsh criticism, as nearly all politicians do. But this particular politician had broken down and wept before my friend. He had really wanted to bring positive change. He had really believed in the vision. He had really wanted to do good.

Party colleagues will usually see everything a politician does as right. Opponents will see everything they do as wrong.

Friendly media may look at a politician superficially and reflect and support their policies. Unfriendly media will look at them critically and declare that much or all of what they do is bad.

Quite possibly they deserve much of this criticism to some degree. But can we **at the same time** look on them with the eyes of love and see a real person genuinely wanting to make a real change, even if that real person is lost somewhere in the recesses of their heart? Isn't that how Jesus would try to see?

The life of faith is very much a journey. We remember that now as we sing, O Jesus I have promised.

Hymn (BPW 352) **O Jesus I have promised**

O Jesus, I have promised
to serve you to the end:
be now and ever near me,
my Master and my friend;
I shall not fear the battle
if you are by my side,
nor wander from the pathway
if you will be my guide.

O let me feel you near me!
The world is ever near;
I see the sights that dazzle,
the tempting sounds I hear;
my foes are ever near me,
around me and within;
but Jesus, draw still nearer,
and shield my soul from sin.

O let me hear you speaking
in accents clear and still,
above the storms of passion,
the murmurs of self-will;
O speak to reassure me,
to hasten or control;
O speak, and make me listen,
O guardian of my soul.

O Jesus, you have promised
to all who follow you,
that where you are in glory
your servant shall be too;
and, Jesus, I have promised
to serve you to the end;
O give me grace to follow,
my Master and my friend.

O let me see your footmarks
and in them plant my own;
my hope to follow truly
is in your strength alone.
O guide me, call me, draw me,
uphold me to the end,
and then in heaven receive me,
my Saviour and my friend!

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.

Notice

We very much hope you have enjoyed listening to Hearsall at Home both today and over the past couple of years. We are indebted to our musicians, including Joan Cobb, Nick Leonard, John Pettifer, Martin Prue, Seb and Fran Farrall and others who have provided such beautiful sounds to accompany our worship. We are grateful to all our readers and leaders of intercessions and to our interviewees and other contributors. Thanks too, to Jackie Pritchard, who faithfully edits the script for the podcast. We are especially grateful to Andy Thompson, our technical manager, who every week weaves together all our various contributions into a coherent sound file.

Starting from next week, we will be slimming the podcast down a bit and giving it a new name: *Knowing You Jesus*. You'll hear the readings and a sermon, and a song or a reflection. In a new feature, we'll also share a conversation between myself and a guest about the theme of the week. We hope you will be blessed by it.