

28th 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 28 6 2020

Going for the One

Invitation to Worship

I will sing of your steadfast love, O Lord for ever;
with my mouth I will proclaim your faithfulness to all generations.
2 I declare that your steadfast love is established for ever;
your faithfulness is as firm as the heavens.

Hymn (BPW 23)

You holy angels bright who wait at God's right hand,
or through the realms of light fly at your Lord's command:
assist our song, or else the theme too high will seem for mortal tongue.

You faithful souls at rest, who ran this earthly race,
and now from sin released behold your Saviour's face:
God's praises sound and all unite in sweet delight to see him crowned.

You saints who serve below, adore your heavenly King,
and as you onward go your joyful anthems sing:
take what he gives and praise him still through good and ill, who ever lives.

So take, my soul, your part; triumph in God above,
and with a well-tuned heart sing out your songs of love:
with joy proclaim through all your days in ceaseless praise his glorious name

Prayers

In a world of pettiness, rules, selfish ambition and manipulation, you O Lord, show us the way of love, a love that is true and deep, everlasting and all-embracing. You continue to love us when we are blind to love, and you see the best in us even when we deliberately show the worst. Your love is visionary, vulnerable, extravagant, nurturing, self-sacrificial, death-defying, unstoppable, mysterious, plain as daylight, rich, generous and beautiful.

So we pause in prayer and reflect on the difficulties we find in loving so truly.

Please forgive us when we lose a connection with your loving heart, and when we don't live out the reality of your steadfast love; for the sake of Jesus Christ, the Lord of Love and the Prince of Peace, whose love for us led him to endure the shame and pain of the cross.
Amen.

We share together in the traditional words of the Lord's Prayer
Our Father who art in heaven
hallowed be thy name.
Thy kingdom come,
thy will be done
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread
and forgive us our trespasses

as we forgive those who trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory
for ever and ever, amen.

Song

Over the mountains and the sea
Your river runs with love for me
and I will open up my heart
and let the Healer set me free

I'm happy to be in the truth
and I will daily lift my hands
for I will always sing
of when Your love came down

*I could sing of Your
love forever x 4*

Oh, I feel like dancing
it's foolishness, I know
But when the world has seen the light
they will dance with joy like we're dancing now

Now, Behind Closed Doors this week was written by our lovely deacon and friend Jan Clemons.

Behind Closed Doors

It's been very interesting to hear over the past 3 months different people's accounts of their experiences behind closed doors. Many of their experiences resonated closely with my own as we adapted to the 'new' normal. Rummaging in cupboards and having a good sort out, catching up on DIY projects, getting the garden sorted out and other household projects including emergencies such as my mobile phone being run over by numerous cars when I drove off with it on my car bonnet.

What I've really missed is my family and friends. Both my children fled the nest as young adults and now have families of their own. Every month I look forward to my trip to Shoreham-by-Sea and having quality time with my two grandchildren and going long walks with them along the beach or the South Downs with their dog Betsy. I speak to my son most weeks, but my granddaughter Bethany aged 5 gets very upset by Facetime sessions as she fears she won't ever see me again. My grandson Ollie aged 9 seems totally absorbed by You Tube influencers and Minecraft but will Facetime me as long as we wear digital animal masks and make silly faces.

My grandchildren in Australia have no such qualms as they are used to these electronic exchanges and relaxing lockdown is well underway over there with both of them back at

school now but it may be some time before I see them in the flesh as the borders may be closed for some time.

I am in total admiration for my sons and their wives of how they are dealing with the lockdown, working from home, doing homeschooling and keeping the kids occupied. I've spent time wondering how I would have coped with the situation when I had a young family and a full-time job as patience is definitely not one of my virtues.

My saving grace has been the allotment (affectionately known as the field) a mere 10 minutes' walk from my house and it's great having Rob around to help with various tasks such as hedge cutting, bramble & nettle clearance and wildflower meadow creation. I'm also bio-blitzing the allotment as the Coventry Natural History Society's visit to do this was cancelled. The aim of this activity is to make a species list of every living organism living there. Bee and dragonfly species are difficult and a pair of binoculars come in handy. The bird life has been amazing including wrens, song thrushes, robins, blue and long tailed tits, myriads of sparrows and a sparrowhawk. The most amazing observation was an exceptionally large glossy black bird with a curved beak which must have been a raven. In Coventry? Amazing! The downside has been a blackfly infestation of my broad beans, a slug fest on my strawberry patch and badgers digging up my potatoes but such is the nature of organic gardening.

I'm really missing Hearsall Luncheon Club which for many members is one of the highlights of their week. We ring round the members every week to see if they are safe and well and if they need any help. Fortunately, most of them have a great support network but are getting fed up with the lockdown and the fact that the Club may not be starting up for the foreseeable future. At least with the relaxation of lockdown they can now go out and be in a family or friend bubble but it's great to chat to everybody regularly and catch up on news which reminds us about pre-lockdown life.

Each week I've been receiving an e bulletin from Warwickshire Wildlife Trust where I came across the Leamington Peregrine Nest Cam. High in the Town Hall clock tower under a webcam's watchful eye I've been watching two peregrine falcons and their three fluffy, awkward babies. I couldn't stop watching and had the falcon cam streaming to my devices all the time watching the babies development, shedding their down feathers, fighting over chunks of meat and developing their flight feathers ready to fly away. Now they've gone I feel a deep sense of accomplishment and miss them. Scientists tell us that our brains respond to images of nature as if we were actually outdoors which explains my enjoyment.

Finally, I really miss my Hearsall family and the Sunday Services and church events and hope and pray it won't be too long before we can all be together again. God bless you all.

Jan Clemons

Offering

O Lord, you are the giver behind every gift. Take these humble gifts and let them play their part in letting your love and light shine brightly in our world.

Song (WT 222)

Jesus be the centre
Jesus, be the centre
Be my source, be my light
Jesus

Jesus, be the centre
Be my hope, be my song
Jesus

Be the fire in my heart
Be the wind in these sails
Be the reason that I live
Jesus, Jesus

Jesus, be my vision
Be my path, be my guide
Jesus

Prayers of Intercession

Our prayers this week are written by Derek Noel and read by Andy Thompson.

Lord , we turn to You for help , for guidance and for strength at a time when there is uncertainty about so much in our lives and the lives of so many other people.

Lord , we pray for all who work in medicine; those engaged in research , especially those involved in finding a vaccine for corona virus. Bless those who work with patients whose life expectancy is low . May they feel your presence with them as they hold the hands of the dying when relatives are unable to be present. We pray for those who work in hospices and other places where there seems no hope of a cure or recovery for the sick they tend.

We bring before you those who face uncertainty in the world of work ; those who work in the hospitality sector , in air transport, and in the cruise industry; those who work in theatres, music and other forms of entertainment. Give them hope that the future will bring recovery so that the talents you have given so many will be used again for the benefit of Others.

We pray for our young people – those who are missing their friends at school and have to learn educational facts through the internet with very little personal contact with teachers . We pray that in the near future many of these problems will be resolved .

We pray for peace . May nations everywhere learn from the disasters and mistakes of history . Bless all those who work to break down barriers of race and class, creed and colour. We remember all who mourn the loss of a loved one through violent attack.

We pray for the leaders of our own nation . Give them the wisdom and the desire to seek the good of those in the greatest need . Guide those who make wide ranging decisions , the wisdom to seek advice and not seek short term popularity.

We pray for your church Lord. Help us to know that although we cannot meet together at present, we are still united by the love of Christ as we care and serve those in our community and in our world.

Finally, in a few moments of quiet we bring friends in need to you for your blessing and help. We bring these prayers in Christ's name AMEN.

And we thank Derek for those thoughtful prayers and also Andy for reading them.

Our Bible readings today are from Genesis and Mark.

Readings

Genesis 22:1-14

1 After these things God tested Abraham. He said to him, 'Abraham!' And he said, 'Here I am.' 2 He said, 'Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt-offering on one of the mountains that I shall show you.' 3 So Abraham rose early in the morning, saddled his donkey, and took two of his young men with him, and his son Isaac; he cut the wood for the burnt-offering, and set out and went to the place in the distance that God had shown him. 4 On the third day Abraham looked up and saw the place far away. 5 Then Abraham said to his young men, 'Stay here with the donkey; the boy and I will go over there; we will worship, and then we will come back to you.' 6 Abraham took the wood of the burnt-offering and laid it on his son Isaac, and he himself carried the fire and the knife. So the two of them walked on together. 7 Isaac said to his father Abraham, 'Father!' And he said, 'Here I am, my son.' He said, 'The fire and the wood are here, but where is the lamb for a burnt-offering?' 8 Abraham said, 'God himself will provide the lamb for a burnt-offering, my son.' So the two of them walked on together.

9 When they came to the place that God had shown him, Abraham built an altar there and laid the wood in order. He bound his son Isaac, and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood. 10 Then Abraham reached out his hand and took the knife to kill his son. 11 But the angel of the Lord called to him from heaven, and said, 'Abraham, Abraham!' And he said, 'Here I am.' 12 He said, 'Do not lay your hand on the boy or do anything to him; for now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me.' 13 And Abraham looked up and saw a ram, caught in a thicket by its horns. Abraham went and took the ram and offered it up as a burnt-offering instead of his son. 14 So Abraham called that place 'The Lord will provide'; as it is said to this day, 'On the mount of the Lord it shall be provided.'

Mark 8: 22 - 35

22 They came to Bethsaida. Some people[d] brought a blind man to him and begged him to touch him. 23 He took the blind man by the hand and led him out of the village; and when he had put saliva on his eyes and laid his hands on him, he asked him, 'Can you see anything?' 24 And the man looked up and said, 'I can see people, but they look like trees, walking.' 25 Then Jesus laid his hands on his eyes again; and he looked intently and his sight was restored, and he saw everything clearly. 26 Then he sent him away to his home, saying, 'Do not even go into the village.'

27 Jesus went on with his disciples to the villages of Caesarea Philippi; and on the way he asked his disciples, 'Who do people say that I am?' 28 And they answered him, 'John the Baptist; and others, Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets.' 29 He asked them, 'But who do you say that I am?' Peter answered him, 'You are the Messiah.' 30 And he sternly ordered them not to tell anyone about him.

31 Then he began to teach them that the Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again. 32 He said all this quite openly. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. 33 But turning and looking at his disciples, he rebuked Peter and said, 'Get behind me, Satan! For you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things.'

34 He called the crowd with his disciples, and said to them, 'If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. 35 For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it.

The way of God is not always an easy way and can take us through the valley of the shadow. Jesus chose the way of the cross to bring us life. We sing to him now: I cannot tell how he whom angels worship...

Hymn (BPW 381)

I cannot tell how he whom angels worship
should stoop to love the peoples of the earth,
or why as shepherd he should seek the wanderers
with his mysterious promise of new birth.
But this I know, that he was born of Mary,
when Bethlehem's manger was his only home,
and that he lived at Nazareth and laboured,
and so the saviour, saviour of the world, is come.

I cannot tell how silently he suffered,
as with his peace he graced this place of tears,
nor how his heart upon the cross was broken,
the crown of pain to three and thirty years.
But this I know, he heals the broken-hearted,
and stays our sin, and calms our lurking fear,
and lifts the burden from the heavy laden,
for still the saviour, saviour of the world, is here.

I cannot tell how he will win the nations,
how he will claim his earthly heritage,
how satisfy the needs and aspirations
of east and west, of sinner and of sage.
But this I know, all flesh shall see his glory,
and he shall reap the harvest he has sown,
and some glad day his sun shall shine in splendour

when he the saviour, saviour of the world, is known.

I cannot tell how all the lands shall worship,
when, at his bidding, every storm is stilled,
or who can say how great the jubilation
when all our hearts with love for him are filled.
But this I know, the skies will sound his praises,
ten thousand thousand human voices sing,
and earth to heaven, and heaven to earth, will answer:
'At last the saviour, saviour of the world, is king!'

A moment of prayer... Now O Lord we thank you for the Scriptures and we ask that we may hear your living word through my prepared message and as we listen and reflect at home.
Amen

Sermon

Going for the One

It's a familiar story. A person reaches out to God only when their circumstances are dire...
About to take a vital exam... Facing an oncologist at the hospital... Contemplating a disciplinary tribunal at work...

O God, help, we might cry. But to which God do we call?

The nursery-school god of fluffy clouds, rainbows and happy endings...
The pawn-broker god who exchanges miracles for church attendance?
A god I can leave in a shrine and visit at my convenience...
A Sunday morning god...
A god who is subject to my control
A god I can fully understand...
A god is in my image...
A god created by me....

A popular god... A false god...

An idol...

It's a temptation for us all

Or can we face the reality of God?

Not the god we made for our convenience, but the God for whose pleasure we are made...
Not the god we created in our image, but the God who created us in his image...
Not the god we write into existence through our words, but the God who spoke us into existence through his...
Not the god who does our bidding as we pray to him, but the God who calls us to do his will on earth as it is done in heaven...
Not an impotent cultural artefact of a god, but the awesome presence of the great unspeakable I AM...

God calls Abraham as the story begins: Abraham! Abraham says Here I am to God's call and gets this terrifying command:

Take your son, your only son, whom you love - Isaac - and go to the region of Moriah. Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering on a mountain I will show you.

Later, the text reports a conversation with Isaac along the way... Abraham is summoned again:

"Father!"

"Yes my son", he replies...

"The fire and wood are here, but where is the lamb for the burnt offering?"

And the next verse, verse 8, is pivotal in this story:

Abraham answered: "God himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering, my son."

Now within this narrative world: Abraham does not know what is going to happen about this burnt offering. As far as he knows at that point in the story, Isaac might well be the offering... We perceive God in 21st century terms. Abraham's God was less well known.

But he trusts that somehow, in ways far beyond anything he can control or comprehend, God would provide; that is, that God would make it OK, beyond all the logical constraints of the situation...

What's going on in Abraham's head defies any logic.

God would make of Abraham's descendents a great nation.

God was clear these descendants were through a legitimate son with his own wife Sarah.

God had provided that legitimate son, Isaac

Now God was saying, kill that son.

Yet God will provide - meaning, God will make it all OK. God will provide a Lamb.

So, did God really want Abraham to think that he should kill his own son? We'll never know what strangely terrifying experience Abraham had had that might have made him think so.

On the surface of things, Abraham's faith has been tested. Would he be willing to give up his own special son, obtained by a miracle as the only link between him and the descendents God has promised him - as many as grains of sand on the shore and shining stars in the sky?

But, for the modern reader at least, what's been road-tested is their own idea of the character of God. What kind of a God can we believe in? One who would call for the killing of children? Our moral reaction to this depiction of God becomes the Word of God for us. No! Whatever was in Abraham's head, we learn in our own reaction to this story: NO! A God who calls for a child to be slain as some sort of faith-test is not worthy of our worship.

Yet before we move on too smartly, we do take another lesson from this story and it's back to where I began, with the awesome reality of God. If God really is God, then God can do whatever God likes with me, his creation.

God is not here to do our bidding. He is not some celestial errand boy running at our beck and call. In the world of his creation, boys and girls and men and women live and they die.

Extraordinary things can and do happen. The sick may be healed. As we put it, prayers are answered. And yet even that phrase betrays our absurd notion of a domesticated God. When we say our prayers have been answered, we so often mean, we got what we wanted.

But God always answers prayer. His answer might be a period of waiting. A resounding No. A bewildering silence. A thunderbolt. A healing. A resurrection. A whisper in the night. A death. God always answers in some way, but the answer he gives is his free choice. He is sovereign and will have his way.

So, two lessons I draw our attention to.

One, this story tests our own idea of God. Our response to the story gives us clarity. We just cannot believe in a God who demands child sacrifice.

Two, and yet God is God. Children live and children die. The Lord gives and the Lord takes away, Blessed be the Name of the Lord... Who can stand before his awesome presence?

And then there's the third thing:
the Lord provides a Lamb!

In our gospel reading set in the far North of Galilee, Jesus has said he will be rejected by all the legitimate religious authorities and that he will suffer in many respects, and that he will be put to death, and that after three days, rise again, although that last must have seemed incomprehensible to Peter and his colleagues then.

Peter rebukes Jesus. Perhaps he stands for those of us who want a safe God of happy endings... It is not to be so.

In fact the pain-free, safe, easy-option is the temptation of a satan... We may think this is a special path for Jesus only in his unique role as Saviour, but Jesus calls the crowd and says, (he clearly wants everybody to know this): "If any want to be my followers, let them deny themselves, and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it."

And yet here's the thing: God provides a Lamb. Jesus is the Lamb. Why must we deny ourselves? Why must Jesus die on a cross?

The answer is Love. As TS Eliot put it:
Who, then, devised the torment?
Love. Love is the unfamiliar name
Behind the hands that wove
The intolerable shirt of flame
Which human power cannot remove.

Love, according to 1 Corinthians 13, endures forever. And so we die to anything that is not love. Self-denial is dying to selfishness. We find who we are through giving ourselves away. Only in loving another do we discover who we deeply are.

On the journey of faith, as we try to make sense of writings which include description of God approving of genocide, we persist until we see that love. Now see that love in the way Jesus tends to the blind man in our gospel reading. He takes the blind man by the hand. That gesture alone might bring tears to my eyes. He leads him gently out of the village - he wants to show compassion to this individual, not perform a stunt for a crowd. Love.

He uses the traditional methods of the day, using saliva, as was typical for healers then. Why? Was there some magic in his saliva? No. Love. He knew this would help the man to trust him. After he has laid his hands on the man, Jesus listens to him, checks with him: What can you see? Love makes him listen. He doesn't just declare a miracle and wander away in a self-satisfied glow. He loves enough to listen, not to his own confidence in his power, but in the man's actual experience. Jesus wants to know that. So the man says he sees people, but they look like trees walking. And Jesus lays on his hands again - in Love he wants this man to be completely healed. And he sees everything clearly. And Jesus wants neither himself nor the man to be crowd-pleasers, so he sends him home the quiet route. This is about how to minister in love.

And it's a parable for us today about seeing God with the eyes of love.

Humanity may have been blind to the love of God, for millennia. Abraham encounters God and humanity gets a partial healing of its blindness to love. So God listens to humanity and knows his saving work is not yet complete. And sends Jesus, the very embodiment of love, to show us that God is love in the tender way he ministers, for example, to this blind man.

We didn't always see it. We saw a God who was wrathful. We even interpret the cross as being concerned with wrath, as if God needed to spend his own anger in an act of violence! Whereas the cross, truly seen, is the very embodiment of love. God would rather die than be unloving.

In seeing the crucified God on the cross we are called to turn and live the life of love for ourselves. God has sent us a Lamb. And this lamb deconstructs the notion of a God who requires a sacrifice. He would rather be the sacrifice and put an end to all talk of sacrifice.

We felt it in our bones when we heard the story of Isaac proposed for a burnt offering. And we faced the independent reality of God... But as we navigate through scripture we increasingly see that the supreme expression of God is in his mercy and love. A God whose love is outrageous, death-defying and life-affirming: this God in all his glory, would meet you.

Not a concept. Not a theological idea. Not a description. No. God himself, as Love Incarnate, would meet you. He does call you to a kind of dying. He calls you to die to anything which is not love.

And to do that is so often to suffer. For there are other forces than love at work in this strange world. But you, will you hold true to this, the awesome reality of the love of God?

We are going for the One: the one life lived in perfect unity with God. Why not be his work of art this week? Why not be his beloved and beautiful creature? Why not become One with the God who is Love?

Song <https://www.grahamkendrick.co.uk/songs/graham-kendrick-songs>

Give me strength when I'm weary

O my Lord

Lift me up when I fall

O my Lord

Light a fire in my bones

That an ocean cannot drown

Give me hope give me strength

Until my work is done

Oh, Jesus be my vision

Oh, the passion and the fire in my soul

We'll keep the banner flying high

The banner flying high

In the valley of shadow

O my Lord

You will walk by our side

O my Lord

If we love not our lives

Rather die than to deny

There'll be crowns there'll be glory

When the morning comes

Those who wait on you patiently

O my Lord

Those who trust in your word

O my Lord

They will soar they will glide

Like an eagle in the sky

They will walk not be weary

Till the work is done

For his glory standing shoulder to shoulder

Proud to bear his holy name

Sound the victory our God is among us now

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.