

16th August 2020

Hearsall at Home

Hello, and welcome to Hearsall at Home.

I am Erica Young, a member at Holyhead Road United Reformed Church. I am leading this service to allow David Sutcliffe a well-deserved holiday.

Today's service includes Holy Communion. Please arrange for some bread and wine or juice to share at the appropriate moment.

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.

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

Morning Worship 16th July 2020

We are all God's People

Invitation to Worship

Our call to worship comes from Psalm 67

May God be gracious to us and bless us and make his face shine upon us,
² that your ways may be known on earth, your salvation among all nations.

³ May the peoples praise you, O God; may all the peoples praise you.

⁴ May the nations be glad and sing for joy, for you rule the peoples justly
and guide the nations of the earth.

⁵ May the peoples praise you, O God; may all the peoples praise you.

⁶ Then the land will yield its harvest, and God, our God, will bless us.

⁷ God will bless us, and all the ends of the earth will fear him.

Prayer of approach.

Let us pray:

Lord God, as we come before you now, we open our hearts to you.

Help us to see that we can learn so much from others, even from those with whom we
think we don't have much in common.

Make us willing to stand out from the crowd, to hear your voice, and act upon
it. **Amen.**

Hymn **Let all the World, in Every Corner, Sing**

Let all the world in every corner sing,

"My God and King!"

The heavens are not too high;

his praise may thither fly;

the earth is not too low;

his praises there may grow.

Let all the world in every corner sing,

"My God and King!"

Let all the world in every corner sing,
"My God and King!"
The church with psalms must shout:
no door can keep them out.
But, above all, the heart
must bear the longest part.
Let all the world in every corner sing,
"My God and King!"

Prayers

Now we bring our prayers to God.

Living Lord, we praise you that you are a God who loves.
You love everyone equally, and we thank you that we are each unique.
We thank you that each one of us has so much to give – and to receive – from each other.
Thank you for each new experience that you give us.

Lord, sometimes we appear to be listening to others, but our attention wanders.
Sometimes we are too distracted by our own concerns and listen only to those who tell us what we want to hear.
Sometimes we don't listen to people because we don't like them or because they are different to us.
Sometimes we don't listen to you Lord, because we are too busy, or because we are afraid of what you might say to us.
Forgive us Lord, for missed opportunities. Amen

And we speak to God now in the words that Jesus taught us:

The Lord's Prayer

Our Father in heaven,
Hallowed be your name,
Your kingdom come, your will be done,
On earth as it is 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 forever. Amen.

Behind Closed Doors

Hi everyone, it's Fran Pritchard here and I'm going to share a little bit of what life has been like for me during lockdown.

Workwise, my school was very understanding, and allowed me to work from home so that I could safely look after my 90-year-old Granny (that's my Dad's mum, Ruth,) until she was able to move into a care home. As she is diabetic, my main job was to inject her with insulin twice a day, as well as getting her meals ready and making sure she was taking her tablets. There were times when I felt like I had re-trained as a nurse! Although there were a few occasions when I slightly resented having to get up early for the breakfast visit, I really wouldn't have changed this time for the world. Our Granny really is one of a kind, and it was an absolute privilege for me to be able to spend this bonus time with her. My visits involved helping her to communicate with my Mum and Dad and Maria, Chris and the boys on Facetime, teaching her to use a mobile phone, looking at old photos and listening to her hilarious stories from the past, a particular favourite of mine being the time she took a pig home on the bus! I really hope that I was able to bring her some comfort at a time when she has felt cut off from everybody else that she knows and loves.

The day after it was announced that schools were closing, I was having a chat with a couple of my little violin pupils, and they decided it would be a good idea for me to make a video of me playing a different instrument every day for them to watch at home. I happily accepted this challenge, thinking it would only be for a couple of weeks or so... fast forward 17 weeks and I had reached Day 71 of my "Miss Pritchard plays a different instrument every day" series. Regrettably, I only managed to get to day 50 before I had to start repeating instruments! If anyone's interested in seeing my attempts to play some of the weird and wonderful instruments that I have somehow accumulated over the years, you can search for me on Youtube!

Although working from home has mainly been fun and games for me, I have had to complete some slightly more mundane tasks including online training, zoom staff meetings and the writing of my 105 music reports.

Aside from work, Seb and I have spent such a lot of quality time together and I truly feel like this was a gift, as up until now life has always been so very hectic. We've enjoyed so many different home-based activities including growing vegetables in the garden, tap-dancing in the kitchen, filming crazy multi-track videos, painting the garden fence, Hong-Kong style BBQs with Jane, training Polyphony the cat to jump over towers of toilet rolls, baking a vast assortment of culinary treats, camping in the garden, and decorating my bedroom, which even involved fitting our own carpet!

Recording hymns for Hearsall Online has become a big part of our weekly routine. Seb has set up his recording studio in the music garage and he's quite the techno-wizard when it comes to recording, mixing and editing the audio tracks. Most of this goes over my head, although he has been trying to train me up as his studio assistant so I can now locate the record button approximately 50% of the time. We have loved having the opportunity to sing in 4-part harmony, although our 2-person choir could do with a few more members! At times it has been a challenge, especially when faced with a hymn we have never heard before, but it has done our sight-reading skills the world of good!

Although we both miss seeing everyone, it has been lovely for us as a couple to be able to participate in both the Hearsall and Salvation Army online services together every week. This has been really special, as it is something that has not often been possible in normal life.

Last week we had a wonderful time in the garden celebrating my Mum and Dad's 42nd and Maria and Chris' 7th wedding anniversaries. This was the first time that we had all been together since my Dad starting shielding in March. Although we were all several metres apart, it was so lovely to finally spend time with each other and, of course, it was an absolute joy to see Rufus and Laurie. I just want to be able to give them all a squeeze now!

Anyway, back to Granny Pritch... three weeks ago she moved into Victoria Gardens Care Home and this was rather a big wrench for me after seeing her every day for such a long time, but we are all so pleased that after a bit of a bumpy start, she seems to have settled in. I've had a few window visits with her now, and on the whole she has seemed positive, and has already started making up nicknames for some of the other residents!

Once Granny had moved in, I had to go back to work and teach a bubble of key worker children, which was a bit of a shock to the system! But, as it happened, there were only actually two weeks of term left, so I'm now happily enjoying the summer holiday, which Seb and I have decided to dedicate to exploring the local countryside. So far we've covered Baginton, Weston-Under-Weatherly, Meriden, Wyken Croft Nature Park, Chesterton and Burton Dassett Hills, and it's exciting to think that there's plenty more out there to discover.

I really hope you are all keeping safe, well and positive in these very strange and worrying times.

Goodbye for now!

Song: From the Sun's Rising

Verse 1

From the sun's rising unto the sun's setting
Jesus our Lord shall be great in the earth
And all earth's kingdoms shall be His dominion
All of creation shall sing of His worth

Chorus

*Let every heart every voice
Every tongue join with spirits ablaze
One in His love we will circle the world
With the song of His praise
O let all His people rejoice
And let all the earth hear His voice*

Verse 2

To every tongue tribe and nation He sends us
To make disciples to teach and baptise
For all authority to Him is given
Now as His witnesses we shall arise

Chorus

Verse 3

Come let us join with the church from all nations
Cross every border throw wide every door
Workers with Him as He gathers His harvest
Till earth's far corners our Saviour adore

Chorus

Ending

*O let all His people rejoice
And let all the earth hear His voice*

Offering

Lord you have given us so much. Help us to be generous in our turn. Accept the gifts we make to church and to charity and use them and us to build your kingdom. Amen

Prayers of Intercession

Dear Father God, we pray for our world, for those countries where there is war and unrest, or famine and drought. We pray for the countries where the Covid-19 virus is having devastating effects on the health of the people and the economy, and especially for those in refugee camps and those for asylum seekers, who are even more at risk as they cannot access soap, water or personal protective equipment. Help bring us all together, Lord, to cope with these situations instead of fighting and dividing peoples in the name of power and greed.

We pray for the governments of all countries, that they make the right decisions for the good of their people, in these difficult times. We pray for our own country under the same difficulties and also those concerned with Brexit and trade deals. We realise

there is a heavy responsibility that goes with these positions, so we ask you, Lord, to equip our leaders with empathy and wisdom.

We pray for our city and for those cities where restrictions have again been put in place to minimise the spread of the virus. Give us patience as we wait for a vaccine that will help us to return to some sort of normal lives.

We pray for those who have been mentally affected by the lockdown and have, sadly, become very wary of meeting people from outside their own “bubble” again. We pray for young children who have become more timid and nervous of all the restrictions put in place, especially where they are too young to understand what is going on. We ask you to be with those who have been shielding as they start to re-join society again. Give them the confidence to take the first steps in a safe way.

We hope that families are able to go away on holiday now or for days out, to spend some time in a different environment and enjoy a break from their routine. Help to keep them all safe. We think of all those who have lost or are in fear of losing their jobs and are worrying about how they are going to cope in the future and maybe can't afford holidays or days out, but are struggling to feed their families.

We pray for the leaders of businesses, charities and corporations, as they have to make very difficult decisions about how they can keep these things going in the future, with loss of earnings and business. Help give them inspiration to put the welfare of people first and find ways to manage without making people redundant. We know many people will have to make sacrifices to do this.

We ask that you give us peace in the face of all these anxieties and uncertainty about the future. Help us to enjoy the good simple things in life, such as the sunshine, nature and the sound of the birds. Make us thankful for our families and friends and give us empathy with those who are struggling and seek to find ways to help them, even with something as simple as a letter, card or telephone call.

We ask you, Lord, to hold in your hands all those who have lost loved ones, those who have been ill, those who are waiting for test results and who may have to have surgery, and self-isolate before that. Also please be with those who are lonely and are craving to be back in company with people, without thinking what government guidelines they might be breaking.

Be with us all, dear Lord, as we ask these things in the name of your dear son, Jesus.
Amen.

Bible Readings

Isaiah 56, v1 and v6-8

Salvation for others

This is what the LORD says:

¹Maintain justice and do what is right,
for my salvation is close at hand and my righteousness will soon be revealed.

⁶ And foreigners who bind themselves to the LORD TO serve him,
to love the name of the LORD, AND to worship him,
all who keep the Sabbath without desecrating it and who hold fast to my covenant—
⁷ these I will bring to my holy mountain and give them joy in my house of prayer.
Their burnt offerings and sacrifices will be accepted on my altar;
for my house will be called a house of prayer for all nations.”

⁸ The Sovereign LORD declares— he who gathers the exiles of Israel:
“I will gather still others to them besides those already gathered.”

Matthew 15:21-28

²¹ Leaving that place, Jesus withdrew to the region of Tyre and Sidon. ²² A Canaanite woman from that vicinity came to him, crying out, “Lord, Son of David, have mercy on me! My daughter is suffering terribly from demon-possession.”

²³ Jesus did not answer a word. So his disciples came to him and urged him, “Send her away, for she keeps crying out after us.”

²⁴ He answered, “I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel.”

²⁵ The woman came and knelt before him. “Lord, help me!” she said.

²⁶ He replied, “It is not right to take the children’s bread and toss it to their dogs.”

²⁷ “Yes, Lord,” she said, “but even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters’ table.”

²⁸ Then Jesus answered, “Woman, you have great faith! Your request is granted.” And her daughter was healed from that very hour.

Our gospel reading reminds us that although we differ in many ways, we are all children of the one God, and we sing about that now.

Hymn: **In Christ there is no East or West**

In Christ there is no East or West,
in him no South or North,
But one great fellowship of love
throughout the whole wide earth.

In him shall true hearts everywhere
their high communion find;
His service is the golden cord
close binding humankind.

Join hands, then, people of the faith,
whate'er your race may be!
Who serves my father as his child
Is surely kin to me.

In Christ now meet both East and West,
in him meet South and North,
All Christian souls are one in him
throughout the whole wide earth.

Sermon

We are all God's People

I bring you greetings from the North Coventry Group of United Reformed churches, which includes the Holyhead Road church. I think the first casualty of the coming lockdown back in March was the evening service where members of Hearsall Baptist and Holyhead Road come together with a handful of others from around the city to worship on the third Sunday evening of each month. Since then, Bill and I have been producing a worship podcast each week, so it wasn't too alarming for me to be asked to provide material for this service as an audio file.

In the encounter between Jesus and the Canaanite woman, we are reminded of a rather unpleasant truth. The Jews of Jesus' day lived in a land that once upon a time they had taken over by force. They lived in a land in which they were perhaps numerically dominant but in which multiple races co-existed under the control of the Roman occupying forces. They lived in a land which they counted as theirs but which other races felt they had a hand in, too, and had a right to live in.

Sounds familiar? Of course it does.

There are a number of places in the world today where multi-racial societies have grown up, where people of different ethnicity and different faith co-exist. In many places this doesn't cause much of a problem. There are quarters of our city that are almost defined by the racial background, and hence religious background, of their inhabitants, but Coventry in 2020 is not a seething hotbed of inter-racial strife.

Elsewhere in the world, it is a different story. We see wars inspired by the inability of people to get on. We had our rather muted celebrations of the 75th anniversary of VE Day back in May. More recent armed conflicts and national upheavals may not have been world-wide, but they have all too often featured enmity between people sharing the same living space but coming – originally – from different ethnic roots. Without any research at all we can all think of such problems in Kosovo and in Bosnia which have ended in war. Obvious racial differences underscore the Israeli-Palestinian conflict that continues to have its twists and turns, and the treatment by China of the Uighur Muslim minority is a current international scandal.

There is an awful lot – emphasis on the word “awful” – an awful lot of racially-motivated conflict in the world. And in the midst of all this we turn to our readings – and we find even Jesus appearing reluctant to share his love and use his power in the interests of a Canaanite woman!

Who were the Canaanites? The answer is that it depends **when** you look. To echo Tim Rice's words from “Joseph” – Way, way back many centuries ago, not long after the Bible began, Jacob lived in the land of Canaan, a fine example of a family man. God's chosen people both went to and came from Canaan.

The land of Canaan, way, way back, was a region spreading roughly between what we now call Egypt and Lebanon, so although the towns that Jesus was visiting were in an

area they called Phoenicia, this Canaanite lady was at home. And yet folk from Israel, that is to say from Judah, and from Galilee, were touring round. Distance-wise, we are about 40 miles north of other places Jesus frequented, quite a way.

But you wouldn't have thought, whether it was near or far, that the Holy Spirit at work in and through Jesus would have had "no-go areas", would you?

The basic story is that the woman begs Jesus for help for her sick daughter. Jesus ignores her. Opinion is divided whether the disciples ask him to help her so that she will stop bothering them, or whether they just think she should be dismissed. Jesus appears to try to excuse himself from intervening:

²⁴ He answered, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel."

I am not your resource, he seems to say. I am not at your disposal.

But she perseveres.

²⁵ The woman came and knelt before him. "Lord, help me!" she said.

He gets abusive – even insulting.

²⁶ He replied, "It is not right to take the children's bread and toss it to their dogs."

Was this really the way that Jews regarded the other inhabitants of their country?

Humans against dogs? Again she perseveres – this insult is like water off a duck's back, it seems.

²⁷ "Yes, Lord," she said, "but even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table."

So Jesus is worn down.

²⁸ Then Jesus answered, "Woman, you have great faith! Your request is granted." And her daughter was healed from that very hour.

All's well that ends well.

But why do this? With a thought Jesus could cure the girl. With a thought he did. Was there a finite reservoir of love that he had, to hand out? We believe not – that's not the sort of God we believe in. Was he doing it as a test of her faith – or of the disciples' own prejudices?

There is a parallel of sorts with that time that Jesus encountered the Centurion with a paralysed servant, recounted back in Matthew chapter 8. The Centurion doesn't ask Jesus to go to his home; rather he believes in the power of Jesus to simply say the word in order to bring about healing.

Again it is someone asking on behalf of someone else. In **that** story the foreigner is used, if I can put it that way, to shame the nation of Israel. In today's story the foreigner is used almost to shame Jesus into giving her something she wants.

But the clue to what we are really talking about lies in Jesus final comment to this Canannite woman.

²⁸ Then Jesus answered, "Woman, you have great faith! Your request is granted." And her daughter was healed from that very hour.

Faith is not just a blind belief that God – or Jesus - will sort us out. It is not just trust. It is not just putting our lives into someone else's hands, though there ought to be elements of hope, belief, trust and letting-go in our faith.

It is, I believe, a more comprehensive thing. It embraces understanding of God's purposes and alignment of our lives and attitudes with them. So I think that Jesus saw that this woman had seen part of the bigger picture. The bigger picture of God. God who, even back in the time of Isaiah was saying,

"... my house will be called a house of prayer for all nations."

⁸The Sovereign LORD declares— he who gathers the exiles of Israel:

"I will gather still others to them besides those already gathered."

At that time the implication was that God's blessing was available to all those who turned to him and served him in the terms laid out in Moses' time and developed through the years. Whatever the detail, the implication was that it was **not just the Jews** who would have access to God, who would, in Isaiah's phrase, be gathered to him.

So the seeds of the more inclusive church, the church that reached out after the death of Jesus to Gentiles as well as to Jews, were sown.

You may or may not find allusions to the racial mix of first-century Roman occupied Palestine interesting, but of course the beauty of the simplicity of the message of Jesus is that it still applies today.

Like another Gospel derived rule – by their fruits you will know them – it is by the words and especially the actions of the varied people we meet or associate with on a personal, local, national or even global scale that we come to see what they are like and whether they are to be encouraged or accepted. Whether we should ally ourselves with them or oppose them.

It is especially relevant as we continue in a phase of the world's life when labels are all too often applied to people - Western, Eastern, White, Black. At a time of global pandemic, it is all too easy to seek to lay the blame for what is happening at the feet of other nations and peoples.

You can't tell what people are like by looking at their passports or following them to their place of worship! To see what people are like you should look at how they speak and what they do. And the invitation to be people of God is universal. Amen.

Song: Let us Break Bread Together with the Lord

Verse 1

Let us break bread together with the Lord!

Let us break bread together with the Lord!

Refrain

When I fall on my knees

With my face to the rising sun,

O Lord, have mercy on me.

Verse 2

Let us drink wine together with the Lord!

Let us drink wine together with the Lord!

Refrain

When I fall on my knees

With my face to the rising sun,

O Lord, have mercy on me.

Verse 3

Let us praise God together in the Lord!

Let us praise God together in the Lord!

Refrain X2

When I fall on my knees

With my face to the rising sun,

O Lord, have mercy on me.

Communion

Invitation to Communion

Our tables of bread and wine are ready.

The table of company with Jesus, and all who love him.

The table of sharing with the poor of the world, with whom Jesus identified himself.

The table of communion with the earth, in which Christ became incarnate.

So come to the table, you who have much faith and you who would like to have more;
you who have been here often and you who have not been for a long time;

you who have tried to follow Jesus, and you who have failed;

Come. It is Christ who invites us to meet him here.

The Story of the Last Supper

Blessed is our brother Jesus, who walks with us the road of our world's suffering, and who is known to us in the breaking of bread.

On the night of his arrest Jesus took bread and having blessed it he broke the bread and gave it to his disciples, saying, "This is my body, given to you".

In the same way he took wine and having given thanks for it he poured it out and gave the cup to his disciples, saying, "This cup is the new relationship with God, sealed with my blood. Take this and share it. I shall drink wine with you next in the coming Kingdom of God".

Thanksgiving Prayer

Loving God, through your goodness we have bread and wine, food and drink, to offer, which earth has given, and human hands have made. May we know your presence in the sharing of the bread, and may we sense the presence of our fellow worshippers, even in our isolation. We celebrate the life that Jesus has shared among his community through the centuries and shares with us now. Made one in Christ and one with each other, we offer these gifts and with them ourselves, a single, holy, living sacrifice.

We offer you praise, dear God, and hearts lifted high, for in the communion of your love Christ comes close to us and we come close to Christ. And with our loved ones,

separate from us now, who yet in this mystery are close to us, we hear the song of your unending greatness.

Holy Lord, God of power and might, heaven and earth are full of your glory, hosanna in the highest.

Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest.

Hear us, O Christ, and breathe your Spirit upon us and upon this bread and wine. May they become for us your body, vibrant with your life, healing, renewing and making us whole.

As we prepare to share bread and wine together in our separate homes, let's pause and take a moment to think of each other and to pray that God's presence unites us in remembering him:

Lord, we remember one another, and in this time of communion we affirm our unity and celebrate the love that binds us always together in love. Amen.

So take the bread in your hands, and break it as I say:

Jesus said, this is my body which is for you. Do this in memory of me.

So let's share the bread together, and as we eat, we remember how Jesus died for each one of us out of his love for us as individuals and to take away our sin.

A period of silence as people share

And now we share the wine or juice. Lift it up as I say,

Jesus said, this cup is the new covenant sealed by my blood. Drink from it, all of you.

So let's share the cup together, and as we drink, we remember that this act of communion unites all your children, in all times and all places. Through this, our sins are forgiven, and you fill us once more with your Holy Spirit.

A period of silence as people share

After taking the bread and wine, we pray once more.

Father of all, we give you thanks and praise, that when we were still far off you met us in your Son and brought us home. Dying and living, he declared your love and gave

us grace. May we who share Christ's body live his risen life; may we who drink his cup bring life to others; and may we whom the Spirit lights give light to the world.

Keep us firm in the hope you have set before us; so that we and all your children may be free, and the whole earth live to praise your name; through Christ our Lord. Amen

Song: **Christ be our Light**

1. Longing for light, we wait in darkness. Longing for truth, we turn to you.
Make us your own, your holy people, light for the world to see.

Chorus

Christ, be our light! Shine in our hearts. Shine through the darkness.

Christ, be our light! Shine in your church gathered to-day.

2. Longing for peace, our world is troubled. Longing for hope, many despair.
Your word alone has pow'r to save us. Make us your living voice.

Chorus

3. Longing for food, many are hungry. Longing for water, many still thirst.
Make us your bread, broken for others, shared until all are fed.

Chorus

4. Longing for shelter, many are homeless. Longing for warmth, many are cold.
Make us your building, sheltering others, walls made of living stone.

Chorus

5. Many the gifts, many the people, many the hearts that yearn to belong.
Let us be servants to one another, making your kingdom come.

Chorus X 2

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, 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.