

23rd August 2020

Hearsall at Home

Hello, and welcome to Hearsall at Home.

Thank you for joining us today. May God bless you as we read, sing and listen together.

Everyone's welcome in my chat room after worship. And don't forget, if you want to sing along to the hymns and songs, you can find all the words as a download on the homepage of our website.

So for now, settle down, be still, and focus your attention on the presence of the God who draws near to you as you draw near to him.

Order of Service for 23rd August 2020

The Gift of Love

Call to Worship

Matthew 16: 13 - 16

When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, 'Who do people say the Son of Man is?' They replied, 'Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets.'

'But what about you?' he asked. 'Who do you say I am?' Simon Peter answered, 'You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.'

And what about you and I? Who do we say that Jesus is? Let's give him the highest honour in the words of our opening song.

Song (WT 241): **Jesus Shall Take the Highest Honour**

Verse

Jesus shall take the highest honour,
Jesus shall take the highest praise;
Let all earth join heav'n in exalting
The Name which is above all other names.
Let's bow the knee in humble adoration,
For at His Name every knee must bow.
Let every tongue confess
He is Christ, God's only Son,
Sov'reign Lord we give You glory now.

Chorus:

*For all honour
And blessing and power
Belong to You, belong to You.
All honour and blessing and power
Belong to You, belong to You,
Lord Jesus Christ,
Son of the living God.*

Verse

Chorus x 2 and repeat last line x 2

Prayers

Jesus, there are many authoritative names in our world... Prime ministers, teachers, queens, lawyers, presidents, doctors, managers, administrators... There are many personal names in our world... friends and sweethearts, husbands and wives, sisters and brothers, neighbours and colleagues... But we give you the name above all these names... You are the Messiah, the Son of the Living God, the Lord of Lords, the King of kings, the source of all love, the fountain of all joy. We worship you.

We confess our small and selfish ways... We cling on to little concerns and we harbour a meanness of spirit that welcomes this one and rejects that one... For these and all our sins forgive us, Lord Jesus, for, though you have the name above all other names, you humbled yourself and walked among us as a servant, died on a cross to bring us salvation and rose on the third day to win our liberty. Hallelujah!

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.

Door Ajar

This week's Door Ajar comes all the way from the state of Queensland in Australia, from Rachel Charters – Barbara and Eric Bremner's daughter (minus any hint of an Australian accent, as I have been asked to read it on Rachel's behalf!).

Good morning Hearsall family.

As a nurse I knew immediately that Covid was going to have a large impact on my life in more ways than one. On the family front, I had just had my birthday in January and one of my birthday cards from my special friends, Deborah and Wilfred, said, 'May this be your best year'. In hindsight one would say this has been the worst year yet, but not for me. So far it has been my best year, as Covid has not claimed any of my family or close friends, and I have made some very special new friends amongst people I met briefly last year when I was over visiting my parents, including Val Taylor, Jean Whitlock and your very own reverend.

Although Australia had relatively few cases of Covid, and deaths recorded early in the year, the main deaths and cases were reported from the Ruby Princess Cruise debacle, where the government let returning travellers land on Australian shores without being tested for Covid or quarantined. In fact, one of our own, in Toowoomba, was on the Ruby Princess and sadly lost his life in my hospital.

As a nurse I do have to gown, glove and mask and wear goggles for Covid patients and other patients on droplet or airbourne precautions. However, sadly, since the Covid outbreak, one issue we continue to face in a lot of hospitals and nursing homes is lack of PPE. One example of the lack of PPE availability was that a couple of months ago, when we had a medical emergency on a potential Covid patient, we had no PPE on the ward. We had to urgently seek PPE, so we could enter the room to assist in the medical emergency. It took longer than we would have liked to source PPE but the outcome was good in that the patient survived.

At present Australia has had a second wave outbreak of Covid – namely in New South Wales and Victoria. Victoria's 2nd outbreak has been, in Australian terms, catastrophic – Victoria has had over 13,000 new cases since Thursday 2nd July. The Victorian and New South Wales borders are now shut, and Queensland has again shut its borders for the second time this year. This has meant families have been torn apart and workers that work across the border have had to apply for special exemptions so that they can still go to work. Many permits have not been granted.

When I reflect on how Covid has personally affected me, I know that for several months I stayed home and rarely visited my sisters, so I felt quite isolated at home.

The law was a bit ambiguous initially, in Queensland, as we were allowed to visit family but there were restrictions placed on how far you could travel away from home, and it didn't appear to apply to visiting family, although no one knew for sure. I did visit my sister, Bec, and her daughter, Ella, a couple of times during the strict lock down but we sat outside her unit or went for a walk, adhering to social distancing laws.

A large way that Covid has affected my life, is going to work every day realising that, as a nurse, my life could be at stake. Not every patient who fit the Covid criteria was initially screened. So there was a real element of fear. As nurses we shouldn't have to go to work knowing we could lose our lives caring for others, but that's the very real fact of what could happen and does happen around the world.

On the home front, Covid has meant that I have spent the large majority of this year without my dog, Seger, and his soulmate niece, Molly. Seger was visiting my friends, Deborah and Wilfred, when the borders were first shut, so I couldn't see Seger for over four months. I had Seger home for 3 weeks when the border re-opened and then he went back to visit Deborah and Wilfred when I was making some family visits to my sisters, and in that week's timeframe our Premier shut the borders for a second time, so yet again I'm still separated from my beloved Seger. Every day I come home from work now and I miss Seger's excited greeting. I have no Seger to cuddle up to at night or to sit beside me when I watch TV. I miss having Seger and Molly follow my every move and look expectantly at me every time I open the fridge, just in case I may have a treat for them hidden inside. They are always so sure I will pull out a special treat for them.

The positive, to me, of Covid is that churches and Bible studies have gone online. This is brilliant for me. As nurses we have to commit to working 3 weekends per month and also work continuous shift work throughout the week, so there's no chance for my attending church or Bible study regularly. However, since Covid, I have been able to listen to the Hearsall church services, weekly, and I have been involved in many of the weekly Bible studies online through Whatsapp. I love how I can listen to the church services anytime I want. I can even hook up my phone and listen to the service through the speakers in my car when I am driving to work or out visiting my elderly friend, Bob, who lives by himself on a rural property. I love the new friends I am making in the Hearsall family. I love seeing the beautiful flower

photos that Denise uploads daily. I absolutely love flowers, so it makes my day, seeing all the beautiful arrangements from such a talented lady.

I also love being in the Hearsall online prayer group – I can pray for so many people from afar. I was also able to sponsor Denise's fundraiser for the hospice through her cycling. If not for Covid, I would not have had these wonderful opportunities. To me these online Bible studies and church services are a real blessing. Whoever would have thought there would be any positives from Covid? And yet there have been.

With love in Christ, from Rachel in Australia.

And we thank Rachel for sharing her view from Australia.

God gave us the gift of Jesus to bring us salvation. Our next hymn traces his journey from Bethlehem to Galilee to Gethsemane to Calvary to a garden... beginning in a byre...

Hymn (BPW 199): **In a Byre near Bethlehem**

In a Byre near Bethlehem
In a byre near Bethlehem,
Passed by many a wandering stranger,
The most precious Word of life
Was heard gurgling in a manger,
For the good of us all.

Chorus

*And he's here when we call him,
Bringing health, love and laughter
To life now and ever after,
For the good of us all.*

By the Galilean lake
Where the people flocked for teaching,
The most precious Word of life
Fed their mouths as well as preaching,
For the good of us all.

Chorus

Quiet was Gethsemane,
Camouflaging priest and soldier;
The most precious Word of life
Took the world's weight on his shoulder,
For the good of us all.

Chorus

On the hill at Calvary –
Place to end all hope of living –
The most precious Word of life
Breathed his last and died, forgiving,
For the good of us all.

Chorus

In a garden just at dawn,
Near the grave of human violence,
The most precious Word of life
Cleared his throat and ended silence,
For the good of us all.

Chorus

Offering

Let's remember together now the great joy of giving.
We thank you Father for the indescribable gift of Jesus. Take now our own humble gifts, and the offering of our lives, so that the good news of Jesus may be shared.
Amen,

Our prayers this week are led by Nick Leonard.

Dear Father God,
We pray for the world that you have created, especially 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 particularly devastating effects, through lack of information, or lack of PPE, lack of good governance, or over-crowding, or lack of basic hygiene materials such as soap and clean water. We pray for the governments of all countries, that they make the right decisions for the good of their people, in these difficult times. Dear Father God, we pray for the world you have created.

We pray for our own country, under the same difficulties, and also those concerned with Brexit and trade deals. We also bring to you young people who are facing a very uncertain future due to the problems processing the national exam results. We pray for those who are having difficulty with lockdown and shielding; for those who are scared of being with people again; for those who are worried about their job or business. 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. Help us to seek to find ways to help them, even with something as simple as a letter, card or telephone call.

Lord, we pray for our church, your community. We pray that you will continue to draw us together, despite the physical distancing enforced upon us. Continue to work through us and inspire us into finding new ways of serving you in the changing world.

Finally, we pray for all those who are known to us individually. So we pray for friends; for neighbours; for those who we know who are having a difficult time at the moment; for those who have particular physical or mental problems.

Jesus, our Lord and friend, we bring all these things to you and lay them down before you, so that you can touch them with your love, healing and understanding. Amen.

And we thank Nick for leading our prayers.

This week our Bible readings come from Exodus and from Romans.

Exodus 1:8 - 2:10

⁸ Then a new king, to whom Joseph meant nothing, came to power in Egypt. ⁹ 'Look,' he said to his people, 'the Israelites have become far too numerous for us. ¹⁰ Come,

we must deal shrewdly with them or they will become even more numerous and, if war breaks out, will join our enemies, fight against us and leave the country.'

¹¹ So they put slave masters over them to oppress them with forced labour, and they built Pithom and Rameses as store cities for Pharaoh. ¹² But the more they were oppressed, the more they multiplied and spread; so the Egyptians came to dread the Israelites ¹³ and worked them ruthlessly. ¹⁴ They made their lives bitter with harsh labour in brick and mortar and with all kinds of work in the fields; in all their harsh labour, the Egyptians worked them ruthlessly.

¹⁵ The king of Egypt said to the Hebrew midwives, whose names were Shiphrah and Puah, ¹⁶ 'When you are helping the Hebrew women during childbirth on the delivery stool, if you see that the baby is a boy, kill him; but if it is a girl, let her live.' ¹⁷ The midwives, however, feared God and did not do what the king of Egypt had told them to do; they let the boys live. ¹⁸ Then the king of Egypt summoned the midwives and asked them, 'Why have you done this? Why have you let the boys live?'

¹⁹ The midwives answered Pharaoh, 'Hebrew women are not like Egyptian women; they are vigorous and give birth before the midwives arrive.'

²⁰ So God was kind to the midwives and the people increased and became even more numerous. ²¹ And because the midwives feared God, he gave them families of their own.

²² Then Pharaoh gave this order to all his people: 'Every Hebrew boy that is born you must throw into the Nile, but let every girl live.'

The Birth of Moses

2 Now a man of the tribe of Levi married a Levite woman, ² and she became pregnant and gave birth to a son. When she saw that he was a fine child, she hid him for three months. ³ But when she could hide him no longer, she got a papyrus basket for him and coated it with tar and pitch. Then she placed the child in it and put it among the reeds along the bank of the Nile. ⁴ His sister stood at a distance to see what would happen to him.

⁵ Then Pharaoh's daughter went down to the Nile to bathe, and her attendants were walking along the river-bank. She saw the basket among the reeds and sent her female slave to get it. ⁶ She opened it and saw the baby. He was crying, and she felt sorry for him. 'This is one of the Hebrew babies,' she said.

⁷ Then his sister asked Pharaoh's daughter, 'Shall I go and get one of the Hebrew women to nurse the baby for you?'

⁸ 'Yes, go,' she answered. So the girl went and got the baby's mother. ⁹ Pharaoh's daughter said to her, 'Take this baby and nurse him for me, and I will pay you.' So the woman took the baby and nursed him. ¹⁰ When the child grew older, she took him to Pharaoh's daughter and he became her son. She named him Moses, saying, 'I drew him out of the water.'

Romans 12: 1 - 8

A Living Sacrifice

12 Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God – this is your true and proper worship. ² Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is – his good, pleasing and perfect will.

Humble service in the body of Christ

³ For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the faith God has distributed to each of you. ⁴ For just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, ⁵ so in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. ⁶ We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us. If your gift is prophesying, then prophesy in accordance with your faith; ⁷ if it is serving, then serve; if it is teaching, then teach; ⁸ if it is to encourage, then give encouragement; if it is giving, then give generously; if it is to lead, do it diligently; if it is to show mercy, do it cheerfully.

The gift of Jesus is very wonderful indeed and we reflect on that gift as we sing our next hymn.

Hymn (BPW 219): **It is a Thing most Wonderful**

It is a thing most wonderful,
almost too wonderful to be,
that God's own Son should come from heaven
and die to save a child like me.

And yet I know that it is true:
he came to this poor world below,
and wept, and toiled, and mourned, and died,
only because he loved us so.

I cannot tell how he could love
someone so weak and full of sin;
his love must be most wonderful,
if he could die my love to win.

It is most wonderful to know
his love for me so free and sure;
but 'tis more wonderful to see
my love for him so faint and poor.

And yet I want to love you, Lord;
O teach me how to grow in grace,
and I will love you more and more,
until I see you face to face.

Lord take my preparation and my words and speak your living word today to each of us as we listen. Amen.

Sermon

The Gift of Love

Well do you love getting presents? How about giving them? I got lots of lovely presents for my birthday last week; I'm a very lucky boy! Now I loved giving gifts to my late wife Ruth, but I didn't always get them right....

Once I got her a lovely sheepskin rug. We'd been staying with some friends, and she seemed to really like the rug they had, so I bought one for her, for Christmas. Well I could tell as soon as she opened it: she hated it.

It's a dead thing, she exclaimed. I suppose, on reflection, that an animal hide rug was not a great gift for a serious vegetarian. Maybe she was just being polite at our friends' house.

Now Ruth would of course often buy gifts for me. Usually I would like them, occasionally maybe not so much. But I tried to see beyond the gift to the giver and its meaning. So I would nearly always declare how pleased I was with the gift, and with sincerity. You see I really **was** pleased, because *Ruth had given this gift to me!*

* * *

Did you spot the gifts in our Romans reading? Believers are to offer themselves as a living sacrifice - a gift - to God. Well, sacrifices were normally killed, but the theology of Romans carries this idea that a Christian has indeed died to the old life of sin and rises to the new life of love, so it kind of makes sense.

Paul urges his readers to be living, breathing, walking gifts. This 24/7 gift **to** God is the very essence of worship. Romans 12 teaches that worship does not consist primarily of singing hymns, but of active service in the world.

So if we're doing something spiritual - singing or reading or praying - the goal is not to get good at doing spiritual things, but to shape us for service in the wider world. In the old cliché, *the worship ends so the service can begin.*

* * *

Now how is your mind these days? Do you forget names and faces and appointments? *How would you fancy having a new mind?* Well, Paul talked about that too in our reading.

So, how can we re-programme these little grey cells? Reading the scripture must be one way. And another is to learn to rest in the all-embracing love of God. I do this by the practice of contemplative prayer, something I'd be very happy to teach you, if you'd be interested.

Do not conform to the pattern of this world!

The renewed mind is non-conformist! We're rebels against the status quo!

We don't run along the same train tracks as everyone else. What do I mean, train tracks? I mean ingrained attitudes, assumptions and prejudices...The core of a renewed mind is this: **An experience of and a commitment to the all-embracing**

love of God. The mind is renewed by resting silently in that all-embracing love. The wiring of our brains gets steeped in wordless grace:
acceptance before assessment;
love before judgment;
mercy before sacrifice.

So a renewed mind doesn't see through the world's eyes. We cut people some slack. We are gentle. We give people time. We forgive. We help people to become better when they've slipped up.

We're uncomfortable with boxing people in and labelling them: Tories, socialists, gays, snowflakes, timewasters, layabouts, spongers, jobsworths, atheists, fundamentalists, smart-Alecs, foreigners, homophobes, idealists, racists, tyrants... Such labels may have their use and may carry some truth, but the renewed mind, over a lifetime, first of all learns the skill of putting aside all the associations and judgments that go with these labels. The primary concern of the renewed mind is to see the very heart of the person we encounter.

Some may see a rough, tattooed, scruffy, heavy, aggressive, Covid-spreading youth... The renewed mind gives him a chance to unfold who he actually wants to be in this world...

* * *

We are not alone as Christians; we also share gifts with one another. It's lovely to swap lots of pressies, and the church, by the way God has wired it up, completely depends on the regular exchange of gifts.

Gifts listed are all ways of helping one another in the community called church: prophesying, serving, teaching, encouraging, giving, leading and showing mercy.

I once was running a meeting of people from several different churches and I wanted them to mingle and learn to work together. I gave each person a happy family card and everyone had to find the rest of their family to begin an exercise.

Well, the happy family cards were a bit of a gimmick. The fact that we each have different gifts in a church community isn't exactly a gimmick, but it is a trick God has

up his sleeve to craft a church into a network of interdependent loving souls. That makes us strong.

Now Paul didn't just list the gifts, he gave an important instruction on how to use them. Now I'm the sort of person who might try and get a new gadget working without reading the instructions. Sometimes I get lucky; sometimes not. You methodical types will tell me how important it is to read the instructions. Well, that's your gift!

Anyway the instruction for the use of gifts in the church is important but simple. **We should use them in proportion to our faith.**

What does that mean?

Go back to the gift of ourselves to God.

Go back to the renewed mind.

Go back to the idea that we have learnt to put aside all labels and prejudice and boxes and allow people to unfold themselves as they truly are. Well, the more we get that, the more effective we are in using our gifts.

The way we deliver the worship documents. The way we speak to the man delivering materials for the church kitchens. The way we serve coffee to a visitor. The way we prepare an act of worship. The way we share with a sister on Facebook. The way we clean the toilets. The way we preach. The way we offer a lift to an infirm friend. If we want it to be effective in God's service, we offer it in proportion to our faith. It's a way of offering our bodies to God. It's a way of working with the all-loving inclusive and renewed mind - the mind of Christ. The more we do that, the more we are really exercising a spiritual gift. No role is too minor to be exempt from this rule. Everything we do for the church, we do in proportion to our faith.

* * *

This may sound all very lovely, but are we in danger of merely building a private community of holy Joes, cut off from the concerns of the world? Once when we were staying in the Alps during my birthday, Ruth's gift to me was a trip in a hot-air balloon to be taken back in Surrey.

When I climbed into the basket of my hot air balloon about fifteen years ago, I rose

high in the Surrey hills and above the cottages of hamlets and villages.

Gardens and field boundaries were walled or hedged and I thought, the higher up we go, the tinier all these barriers between one another become. At ground level, a six foot wall is a formidable block. Rise thirty or sixty or a hundred feet and it becomes a silly detail humanity has scratched on to God's beautiful earth.

The nearer to God we fly, the more we realise that we are all one, and that no human barrier can be sustained in the white heat of God's holy passion.

And maybe this is the gift we in turn offer to the world. We are a place where the barriers seem tiny and paltry. And that spills out into the world at large, and inspires us to live out, and sometimes speak about, the caring heart of Christ who, like a mother hen gathering her chicks under her wing, would gather all the lost and confused people into his love.

* * *

Now anyone can catch Covid-19. The virus could lead us as a species to transcend national barriers and co-operate for the good of all humanity. Or it could lead nations to buy up PPE and vaccines for their own citizens at the expense of poorer, less powerful nations. We hear of Russia and the USA and Britain creating and competing hard for anti-virus resources. But how is it going for PPE in Zambia? Where will Rwanda come in the pecking order for vaccines? How will Bangladesh cope with a global economic slowdown? The renewed mind asks such questions as these.

Well, not many of us are policy makers, but we can lobby our politicians. And locally, what gifts can you bring to build up the unity of us all? Look out in the coming seven days! What gifts of love might you be able to give to the people God sends your way?

I have been sorting through my possessions over the last couple of years. I took Ruth's clothes to the Myton Hospice shop, including a beautiful long blue cardigan I once bought her - she liked it; it was a hit! But what use to me now?

What remains is the love. All these gifts of sheepskin rugs and hot air balloon trips and cardigans and trees and cameras and phones we shared over the years... The

items themselves come and go, but we sense and trust that the love remains. All these gifts are the ephemeral clothing of eternal love.
Even our bodies are ephemeral clothing of eternal love.

And the love endures. Ruth has gone but, in going, she gave me one last gift. She told me to find someone else to love, because, she said, I was a man who needed to love someone. And I have. And I am. And I do.

Give some love gifts this week.

We sing two worship songs as we offer ourselves again to the service of Jesus. He receives us in love. He reveals the beauty in us all. He sends us out in joy.

Songs (WT 242): **Jesus Take Me as I Am**

Jesus take me as I am;
I can come no other way.
Take me deeper in to You,
Make my flesh life melt away,
Make me like a precious stone,
Crystal clear and finely honed,
Life of Jesus shining through
Giving glory back to You.

Repeat

(495): **You Shall Go Out with Joy**

Verse

You shall go out with joy
And be led forth with peace;
The mountains and the hills
Will break forth before you;
There'll be shouts of joy
And all the trees of the field
Will clap, will clap, their hands!

Chorus

And all the trees of the field will clap their hands;

The trees of the field will clap their hands;

The trees of the field will clap their hands;

While you go out with joy!

Repeat Verse

Chorus X 3

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.