

13th September 2020

***Hearsall at Home***

Hello everybody, and a very warm welcome to Hearsall at Home.

It's wonderful that you are joining us today. May God bless you as we read, sing and listen together.

A written copy of the service is also available on our website, so if you know anyone who would like that please let us know.

Don't forget if you're enjoying these services, spread the word. Copy the link. Email your friends. Put us on FaceBook.

So for now settle yourself into stillness, and be ready to meet with God.

Order of Service for 13th September 2020

***Looking up to each other***

Call to Worship

Referring to Exodus 15: 2 - 3

Then Moses and the Israelites sang this song to the Lord:

'I will sing to the Lord,  
for he is highly exalted.

Both horse and driver  
he has hurled into the sea.

2 'The Lord is my strength and my defence;  
he has become my salvation.

He is my God, and I will praise him,  
my father's God, and I will exalt him.

3 The Lord is a warrior;  
the Lord is his name.

4 Pharaoh's chariots and his army  
he has hurled into the sea.

The best of Pharaoh's officers  
are drowned in the Red Sea...

Such passages are not easy to interpret.

Let us at least learn that God takes the side of the oppressed, that he challenges the oppressor and that he enters human history on behalf of the weak, and that our God is a mighty Saviour.

Our first hymn is Holy, holy, holy... Our God is great and mysterious, and we adore him forever.

Hymn (BPW 51) **Holy, Holy, Holy,**

Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty!

Early in the morning our song shall rise to thee;

Holy, holy, holy, merciful and mighty,

God in three Persons, blessed Trinity!

Holy, holy, holy; all the saints adore Thee,  
Casting down their golden crowns around the glassy sea;  
Cherubim and seraphim falling down before Thee,  
Which wert, and art, and evermore shalt be.

Holy, holy, holy, though the darkness hide Thee,  
Though the eyes of sinful man Thy glory may not see,  
Only Thou art holy; there is none beside Thee,  
Perfect in power, in love, and purity!,

Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty!  
All Thy works shall praise Thy name in earth and sky and sea;  
Holy, holy, holy, merciful and mighty,  
God in three Persons, blessed Trinity!

### Prayers

Today we take our time as we pray the Lord's Prayer, slowly, mindfully and heartfully. I will suggest the actions we sometimes do, so you may like to join in with these or not. Either way, savour the words as we say them, and ponder what they mean for you, in your world, right now. You may even like to stand.

Our Father in heaven,  
*You may like to slowly raise your arms*

hallowed be your name,  
*You may like to raise those arms still higher*

your kingdom come, your will be done,  
*Beckon God's kingdom here with your hands*

on earth as it is in heaven.  
*Point to earth and then point to heaven.*

Give us today our daily bread.  
*Make a bowl for food with your palms.*

Forgive us our sins  
*Brush off sins with one hand from the other.*

as we forgive those who sin against us.

*Swap arms and brush off again.*

Lead us not into temptation

*Place one arm diagonally across your chest.*

but deliver us from evil.

*Place your other arm across your chest to form a diagonal protective cross.*

For the kingdom, the power and the glory are yours

*Gradually raise your arms higher*

Now

*Point to where a wristwatch might be*

and forever.

*Roll your hands around each other.*

Amen.

*Give a thumbs up.*

We continue to worship God, body and soul, as we sing the simple song, *Father, I adore you*. Try not to be absorbed in the reading of text; it's so simple! Just let the words flow through you as you dedicate yourself to our Lord of Love...

### Song (WT 90) **Father, I Adore You**

Verse 1

Father, I adore You,

Lay my life before You,

How I love You.

Verse 1 again **(as a round)**

Verse 2 **(as a round)**

Jesus, I adore You,

Lay my life before You,

How I love You.

### Verse 3 (as a round)

Spirit, I adore You,  
Lay my life before You,  
How I love You.

I am delighted that our **Door Ajar** feature this week comes from our dear friends, Eric and Barbara Bremner.

Doors Ajar, Eric Bremner here. Good morning friends. Many of you I haven't met for some time, I hope you are all well. I was brought up in the Aussie bush, seven miles from the nearest sealed road. We had to fend for ourselves and make our own action. The bread, meat and grocery men arrived in little vans, weekly - if you ran out you waited till next week! Our nearest bus stop was seven miles away - it was bike or walk! The restrictions of Covid 19 were never going to worry me unduly; I believe I continue to cope very well. In saying that, I realise it can be hard for many people on their own or with health issues. Barbie and I, as company for each other, is a great help. What I struggle with most of all, as one of the medical lock-ins, I'm unable to get out and help everyone cope with the virus but just to watch it unfold. I've been watching through my only means available, the media, and if I look at it through 'The Mirror' and then the 'Daily Mail', I seem to be looking at two totally different universes – it's very confusing! If I watch it through some social media, my confidence in psychiatry is greatly reinforced. Whichever way I look at Covid 19, it appears to me that out of every ten people, two are trying to do something to help, six are criticising the two that are doing the helping, and the other two are ignoring the whole thing completely – a very sad situation which, if it continues, the virus will be with us for a long time yet, particularly if politics continues to be more important than life and death. It is, however, good to have the additional freedoms and to be released a bit. When bubbles of six came in, Barbie and I, plus four friends were able to go on outings. We started weekly with outdoor picnics and more recently to café and teahouse-type meals. We vary the places we go to, often to some local beauty spot, and all look forward to it very much. We also do longer walks with a couple of friends in our bubble which, as well as the banter, helps me to keep the fitness levels up a bit. We can now also pop into one of the smaller shops or supermarkets to pick up a few things we need. We are determined to continue to follow the rules for the benefit of everyone. We have no opinion on what is going to happen in the future; we leave

that to the scientific and medical experts. We realise they might not always get it right but they are one of the groups that openly admit that they don't know yet. We're not going to add our ignorance to that lot. We continue to trust in God to see us and our family and friends through the pandemic and out the other end. There are more empathetic people to help those who will be hurting from its impacts.

Barbara Bremner – Now we can go out a bit, as long as we are careful, many things are still not working properly: doctors, vets and hospitals. People still care for each other and help where they can, phoning and emailing and, most of all, praying for people. Eric and I have noticed one good thing with doors ajar, we have noticed there are families with grandparents walking through the woods and down the streets all together, which we never saw before. It is a delightful sight, seeing three generations together. Some also have dogs, which has enabled us to make new friends with people and their dogs!

Thanks so much for sharing, Barbara and Eric.

Well, we honour the name of Jesus! He is the Lord of our hearts, the inspiration for our lives, and the source of life unending. We glorify him as we sing, *Jesus is the name we honour.*

**Song (WT 230) **Jesus is the Name we Honour****

Jesus is the name we honour;  
Jesus is the name we praise.  
Majestic name above all other names,  
The highest heaven and earth proclaim  
That Jesus is our God.

*Chorus*

*We will glorify, we will lift Him high,  
We will give Him honour and praise.  
We will glorify, we will lift Him high,  
We will give Him honour and praise.*

Jesus is the name we worship;  
Jesus is the name we trust.  
He is the King above all other kings,  
Let all creation stand and sing  
That Jesus is our God.

*Chorus*

*We will glorify, we will lift Him high,  
We will give Him honour and praise.  
We will glorify, we will lift Him high,  
We will give Him honour and praise.*

Jesus is the Father's splendour;  
Jesus is the Father's joy.  
He will return to reign in majesty,  
And every eye at last shall see  
That Jesus is our God.

*Chorus x2*

Offering

Now we worship God by remembering our offering.

Lord Jesus, you left your throne and your kingly crown when you came to earth for us. Help us to be both sacrificial and loving in all our giving, and take our gifts to church and charity, and use them to bring your love into our world.

Our prayers this week are led by our dear friend, Louise Prue.

The Lord is near. <sup>6</sup>Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.<sup>7</sup> And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Let us pray.

God of love, grace and mercy,

We continue to pray for areas of the world where ongoing conflict continues to cause many to lose their lives and many to flee their homes and seek refuge in other

countries. We pray for compassion in the way refugees and asylum seekers are treated. We pray especially for the crisis in Yemen, and the recent fire in the vast refugee camp on the Greek island of Lesbos – we pray for the homeless refugee population and the people of Lesbos as they support them.

We commit to you, Lord, organisations such as Christian Aid, who are passionately lobbying the British government, the International Monetary Fund and international governments for debt relief for the world's poorest countries so they can use their funds to fight this worldwide health crisis – rather than divert funds to meet debt repayments.

We lift up our dear friends, Lee, Sarah and their children: Rouven, Livia, Yves and Avelyn, and thank you for the blessing of their recent visit to Coventry. We pray for them as they return to Germany and pray that you will continue to bless their life and the mission work in Benin in West Africa, as they prepare to return in the New Year. Let us, during this coming week, remember to pray for those areas of the world which may be on our hearts.

In the UK, we pray for those experiencing poverty and spiralling debt as a result of job losses caused by the Covid19 lockdown. We pray for a recovery that is creative, green and safe as our country seeks to find a new way forward rather than return to how it was before. We pray for any we know personally who are suffering as a result of redundancy or shortened hours.

We pray especially for those bereaved, injured and affected by the stabbings in Birmingham city centre. We pray for healing of bodies and minds. We pray for the police that they are given adequate resources in our communities.

As our education services are encouraged to open their doors to learners, children, young people and adults, once again, we pray that this will be done wisely and responsibly and that human life and safety will prevail over economics. We pray for those who are fearful at the prospect of returning to classes, whether as educators or learners, and pray that each nursery, school, college and learning centre will be equipped with the resources needed to prevent escalation of the virus and to keep everyone safe.

We pray for the church that we would be unflinching in supporting those suffering poverty and disadvantage in whatever way we can, bringing love, kindness, grace and hope for those who are most in need. We give thanks and pray for Coventry City Mission, Carriers of Hope and Foodbanks, the Trussell Trust, as they work to support people who need their help, especially with the complications caused by social distancing. We pray for volunteers from churches who act as Street Pastors in our city centres – for those back out in Coventry on Friday and Saturday nights helping vulnerable people.

And we pray for each other, in our church family here at Hearsall – and those beyond - We continue to pray for those who have recently been on the Hearsall prayer chain and others known to us.

Lord of all hopefulness, we commit all these prayers to you in the name of Jesus Christ, our Saviour and Redeemer.

And as the people of God, we say together - Amen

We thank Louise for those prayers.

And now we hear our Bible readings from Romans and then from Matthew.

Romans 14: 1-12

### The Weak and the Strong

14 Accept the one whose faith is weak, without quarrelling over disputable matters.

<sup>2</sup> One person's faith allows them to eat anything, but another, whose faith is weak, eats only vegetables. <sup>3</sup> The one who eats everything must not treat with contempt the one who does not, and the one who does not eat everything must not judge the one who does, for God has accepted them. <sup>4</sup> Who are you to judge someone else's servant? To their own master, servants stand or fall. And they will stand, for the Lord is able to make them stand.

<sup>5</sup> One person considers one day more sacred than another; another considers every day alike. Each of them should be fully convinced in their own mind. <sup>6</sup> Whoever regards one day as special does so to the Lord. Whoever eats meat does so to the Lord, for they give thanks to God; and whoever abstains does so to the Lord and gives thanks to God. <sup>7</sup> For none of us lives for ourselves alone, and none of us dies

for ourselves alone. <sup>8</sup> If we live, we live for the Lord; and if we die, we die for the Lord. So, whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord. <sup>9</sup> For this very reason, Christ died and returned to life so that he might be the Lord of both the dead and the living. <sup>10</sup> You, then, why do you judge your brother or sister? Or why do you treat them with contempt? For we will all stand before God's judgment seat. <sup>11</sup> It is written:

“As surely as I live,’ says the Lord,  
'every knee will bow before me;  
every tongue will acknowledge God.’”

<sup>12</sup> So then, each of us will give an account of ourselves to God.

Matthew 18: 21 – 35

### The parable of the unmerciful servant

<sup>21</sup> Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, ‘Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother or sister who sins against me? Up to seven times?’

<sup>22</sup> Jesus answered, ‘I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times.

<sup>23</sup> ‘Therefore, the kingdom of heaven is like a king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. <sup>24</sup> As he began the settlement, a man who owed him ten thousand bags of gold was brought to him. <sup>25</sup> Since he was not able to pay, the master ordered that he and his wife and his children and all that he had be sold to repay the debt.

<sup>26</sup> ‘At this the servant fell on his knees before him. “Be patient with me,” he begged, “and I will pay back everything.” <sup>27</sup> The servant's master took pity on him, cancelled the debt and let him go.

<sup>28</sup> ‘But when that servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred silver coins. He grabbed him and began to choke him. “Pay back what you owe me!” he demanded.

<sup>29</sup> ‘His fellow servant fell to his knees and begged him, “Be patient with me, and I will pay it back.”

<sup>30</sup> ‘But he refused. Instead, he went off and had the man thrown into prison until he could pay the debt. <sup>31</sup> When the other servants saw what had happened, they were outraged and went and told their master everything that had happened.

<sup>32</sup> ‘Then the master called the servant in. “You wicked servant,” he said, “I cancelled all that debt of yours because you begged me to. <sup>33</sup> Shouldn't you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you?” <sup>34</sup> In anger his master handed him over to the jailers to be tortured, until he should pay back all he owed.

<sup>35</sup> 'This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother or sister from your heart.'

Matthew's chilling story surely teaches us above all else that if we want to be part of God's kingdom of mercy and love, we ourselves must be merciful and loving. It has to be so. Otherwise, how would we fit in? We pray over these things as we sing, *Brother, sister, let me serve you.*

Hymn (BPW 473) **Brother, sister, let me serve you**

Brother, sister, let me serve you,  
Let me be as Christ to you;  
Pray that I might have the grace to  
Let you be my servant, too.

We are pilgrims on a journey,  
We are companions on the road;  
We are here to help each other  
Walk the mile and bear the load.

I will hold the Christ-light for you  
In the night-time of your fear;  
I will hold my hand out to you,  
Speak the peace you long to hear.

I will weep when you are weeping,  
When you laugh I'll laugh with you;  
I will share your joy and sorrow  
Till we've seen this journey through.

When we sing to God in heaven  
We shall find such harmony  
Born of all we've known together  
Of Christ's love and agony.

Brother, sister, let me serve you,  
Let me be as Christ to you;  
Pray that I may have the grace to  
Let you be my servant, too.

And now, O Lord, may the words of my mouth and the thoughts of all of our hearts  
be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

### Sermon

#### ***Looking up to each other***

If, in my fantasies, I was asked to do a session for Matthew Paris' *Great Lives* programme on Radio 4, the biography show about people who've really inspired the person being interviewed, I would choose Marc Chagall, at the moment, the artist I mentioned in a sermon about a month ago. And I'm thinking, Why do I like him so much? It's partly his vibrant colours; it's partly the sadness that he portrays in his circus scenes and yet infuses it, at the same time, with vivid colours of joy. But I think it's mainly the way that Marc Chagall seems to cross boundaries.

So he was a Jew, brought up in Russia, yet, paradoxically, wonderfully, beautifully, he painted many crucifixion pictures. He just saw Christ as a symbol of human suffering, and he painted crucifixion pictures in the midst of human suffering too. So I love the way, whilst he remained a Jew, he wouldn't be bound by his Judaism into certain things he could do and certain things he could not do. And if he wanted to be moved by the crucifixion, he would be moved by the crucifixion. And paint it.

I like the way he crosses boundaries in the style of his art. If he wants to put a pair of lovers or a bouquet of flowers or an ox or a fiddler somewhere upside down in the sky in his picture, he'll do that, because his aim isn't to give a photographic representation of reality but to share the way his heart saw the world. So he wouldn't be bound by naturalistic conventions.

And I like the way, too, that he wouldn't be bound by artistic conventions. He was asked to join the surrealist movement, working as he was in the 20th century, and he politely refused. Maybe he was a bit fed up with the way other artists had treated him

in the past, but I think also he just didn't want to be confined to a school with rules and expectations, patterns to follow. He wanted to paint as he wanted to paint.

Well, I'm recording here at Draycote Water today, a lovely place to record, and I'm very happy to be sitting by a lake, listening to the birds, enjoying the view. If you're hearing this on Sunday 13th September, that was my mother's birthday and our passage from Romans always reminds me of my mother, because of that phrase *Who are you to judge someone else's servant?*

My dear mum, I think she loved me as best she could but she was a complete mystery to me and often just didn't really get things right at all. And so I had quite a difficult upbringing in many ways, and yet, she had a faith, and she tried to follow God, and go to church and bring love into the world as best she could. So who am I to judge or criticise someone else's servant?

That was a quick cyclist going by. What's that bird; is it a crow? You twitchers would know, I'm sure. There it goes again, Anyway, I wanted to share with you too about the way we look at each other. And I gave myself the working title, looking up to each other. It made me think too of the idea of looking each other up; caring about each other, taking an interest in each other, connecting with each other. But somehow, in the mystery of the Christian faith, a mature Christian is someone who can just always look up to a fellow believer.

It's easy to walk around supposing that we have got it right. And in our theology, our belief, our understanding of the scriptures, our tradition of worship, to think we've got it just right, that's how things should be. And then subtly, but monstrously, we think that we've got God in our system... in our box as well. But God is not a Baptist. And still less is God thinking, *Ah, the place where they worship me right is Hearsall Baptist Church. They're the ones who've got it right!* Well, I might feel that I've got it right sometimes; we might feel that we've got it right. But I think most of us know that God is so very much bigger. So we can meet people who've got a very different experience from us, and we may find ourselves beginning to be a bit critical about the way they worship or the way they run church; the way they read the Bible; the way they don't read the Bible; the way they sing hymns; the way they sing songs. But who are we to judge someone else's servant? They'll stand, because the Lord is able to make them stand.

When we look at our Exodus reading we hear of the chariots and horses and soldiers of Egypt being thrown into the sea by the miraculous deliverance of God's people from slavery. And it's a challenge to fit this into our belief system. Our theology. Perhaps it's not a challenge for you. Perhaps you think, yeah, they were the bad guys, the Egyptians and so God destroyed them. For others of us, it's a huge problem. We feel that God is love and that God would not go around smiting anybody or drowning anybody, killing whole groups of people, even invading armies.

Well, I expect some of you can tell me what kind of plane that is. Andy, I know you're more trains, but can you tell a plane by the sound? I don't know. It's a mystery to me; life is a bit of a mystery. We understand some things to a degree, but none of us completely understands them. One person might paint a picture of God as being inclusive and peace-loving and completely beyond all violence. Another will remind us that God is on the side of the oppressed, and that God opposes the arrogant and that God holds to account those who oppress the innocent. Who's right? How do we decide who's right? There are Bible stories and Bible passages supporting either view.

And here's the thing: In the end, I think, we have to encounter God in the nakedness of our own souls. We have to be prepared to admit that we don't know. That God isn't impressed by suits and guitars and organs and the whole culture of a Baptist church. And that God is at work in other churches, in other religions, in other people, in other creatures and throughout the planet and throughout the universe. And so I find myself hungering for that naked encounter with God himself.

A couple of weeks ago we heard the story of the burning bush and I didn't remark upon it then. But that story gives us two fascinating ways of thinking about God. One is that God is the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, he's on their side! And yet that God is also the great I AM, the God who identifies with existence itself. The God who always was, who always is and who always will be. As churches rise and fall and come and go, as people live their lives and die, God remains the same, the great I AM. And I trust that people like Chagall in their artwork, for all their imperfect lives, had a way of seeing beyond all of the cultural constructions of humanity. A way of seeing to what really mattered. That's a fisherman's boat over there.

I sat for a while earlier on, on the bench which is a memorial to our own dear, dear friend Barbara Bull and her husband Eric, whom I never knew. We live our lives, we come and go, and as we grow and learn and change we begin to find some peace. And here we are on this planet, in this impossibly beautiful world, and what God calls us to do is to find love and wonder and joy; to worship God and to serve him forever. Not as part of some religious ritual, but simply as a way of being alive.

So, can we worship God as a way of being alive? Can we share peace, love, joy, hope and power with all people we meet, whether or not they fit into our worldview? Can we share forgiveness to all?

We sing, *Peace, I give to you.*

**Song (WT 344) **Peace I Give to You (as a round)****

Peace I give to you, I give to you My peace. X2

*Chorus:*

*Let it flow to one another, let it flow, let it flow.*

*Let it flow to one another, let it flow, let it flow.*

Love I give to you, I give to you My love. X2

*Chorus*

Hope I give to you, I give to you My hope. X2

*Chorus*

Joy I give to you, I give to you My joy. X2

*Chorus*

Grace I give to you, I give to you My grace. X2

*Chorus*

Power I give to you, I give to you My power. X2

*Chorus*

We continue to share peace as we say the words of the grace together:

### 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

And may that peace stay with you whatever the coming week may hold, and may that peace bring us together as a community who love him. We sing, *May the peace of the Lord Christ go with you...*

### 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.