

27th September 2020

***Hearsall at Home***

Hello, and welcome to Hearsall at Home.

We will praise God together in our hearts and with our lips. Let us be ready, too, to serve him too with our very lives.

Our time of fellowship this Sunday is on Zoom from 11:30am.

Please go to:

Join Zoom Meeting

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/85454368639>

Meeting ID: 851 6681 8535

No password is required for this session.

We still ourselves in the presence of the God who was, and is, and who is to come.

Order of Service 27<sup>th</sup> September 2020

***The follow-through***

Call to worship

Psalm 25: 1 - 9

1 In you, Lord my God,  
I put my trust.

2 I trust in you;  
do not let me be put to shame,  
nor let my enemies triumph over me.

3 No one who hopes in you  
will ever be put to shame,  
but shame will come on those  
who are treacherous without cause.

4 Show me your ways, Lord,  
teach me your paths.

5 Guide me in your truth and teach me,  
for you are God my Saviour,  
and my hope is in you all day long.

6 Remember, Lord, your great mercy and love,  
for they are from of old.

7 Do not remember the sins of my youth  
and my rebellious ways;  
according to your love remember me,  
for you, Lord, are good.

8 Good and upright is the Lord;  
therefore he instructs sinners in his ways.

9 He guides the humble in what is right  
and teaches them his way.

Let us come to this great God of our mothers and fathers and praise his holy name  
as we sing, Praise, my soul, the King of Heaven.

Hymn (BPW 65) **Praise, my soul, the King of Heaven**

Praise, my soul, the King of heaven;  
To his feet your tribute bring.  
Ransomed, healed, restored, forgiven,  
Who like me his praise should sing:  
Praise Him, praise Him,  
Praise Him, praise Him,  
Praise the everlasting King.

Praise Him for his grace and favour  
To our fathers in distress;  
Praise Him still the same for ever,  
Slow to chide, and swift to bless.  
Praise Him, praise Him,  
Praise Him, praise Him,  
Glorious in his faithfulness.

Father-like, He tends and spares us;  
Well our feeble frame He knows;  
In His hands He gently bears us,  
Rescues us from all our foes.  
Praise Him, praise Him,  
Praise Him, praise Him,  
Widely as his mercy flows.

Angels, help us to adore Him,  
You behold Him face to face,  
Sun and moon, bow down before Him;  
Dwellers all in time and space,  
Praise Him, praise Him,  
Praise Him, praise Him,  
Praise with us the God of grace.

### Prayers of Adoration and Confession

Loving Lord, we have known your tender care throughout our lives and we adore you for your unending mercy and for your steadfast love and for your majestic and holy name.

But who are we to praise your name? We are weak, and we often say, do or think in a way that is far from your plan of beauty and love. Forgive us our sins, draw us into the heavenly realms, open our mouths to sing your praise, and charge us once again with the great commission of love... For Jesus' sake Amen.

### 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.

In Jesus, God entered his world and walked among us. We celebrate his presence with us still today as we sing Emmanuel...

### Song (WT 76) Emmanuel, Emmanuel

Emmanuel, Emmanuel,

His name is called Emmanuel.

God with us, revealed in us,

His name is called Emmanuel.

Emmanuel, Emmanuel,

His name is called Emmanuel.

God with us, revealed in us,

His name is called Emmanuel.

God with us, revealed in us,

His name is called Emmanuel.

Our **Door Ajar** this week is from Jean Whitlock. I called her on Tuesday and prompted her with some questions, feverishly typing up her answers as she spoke. Then I did a little editing mainly to take out my questions. Orane volunteered to voice up the result...

When lockdown was first announced I felt a bit devastated as if everything would just stop; as if a light had been switched off. But I found that going for a walk in the woods was a great help. I enjoyed simple things like seeing nature, and it was helpful that the weather was extra-kind to us. I was helped a lot by phone calls and emails from friends. Keeping in touch with people was very important to me. I got support from others and that helped. Nick Leonard did a wonderful job of helping with my shopping; I couldn't fault him at all.

I read a lot.... Not Einstein or anything like that... I like novels, but not anything too 'sloppy'.... I like it if it's a bit exciting. I like reading historical novels set in World War II or even World War I. I like to read about the characters and the effect the wars have on them. I also like knitting and am doing a cardigan at the moment... It might take me several weeks to finish as I tend to work at it like mad for a time, and then put it to one side! I like doing jigsaws, crosswords and sudoku. In the evening I watch some television; I like the cookery programmes and the quiz shows like University Challenge.

When lockdown eased a little, I began to enjoy meeting up with a small group of church friends every Wednesday. It has been something to look forward to; before that, every day was the same. It was good to be able to drive again and, whilst I appreciated Nick's help, doing my own shopping has given me back my independence after not driving for a couple of months.

My own health has not been too bad recently and I am thankful not to have caught the virus. When I am out and about I use a mask and follow social distancing and use hand sanitisers - I follow all the safeguards. So I am thankful I have been okay.

I don't know anyone personally who has had the virus, though I did meet the late Maurice Markham a couple of times. Friends of friends have had the virus.

I do feel a bit apprehensive about the future. We seem to be in such a big mess at the moment. If we're going to have more restrictions put on us it's going to be bad for

the economy again. It's going to take a long time to recover. So I pray that everybody will stay well; I keep to Hearsall's prayer chain quite a bit. I pray that the politicians, the ministers and the scientists will all be able to work together to put an end to this terrible virus. I do pray that a vaccine will be found soon.

Spiritually I feel about the same as ever. I feel God is close to me. He's always with me, even if I feel I am struggling a bit. He's always there to help me.

It will be good when we can get together again for worship. We all, being Christians, love and respect one another, so if we do meet, we are going to be very careful, aren't we, and be aware of one another. I am not too worried about not singing, because it's better to be worshipping with other Christians, even though we can't sing out loud. We would have the music, wouldn't we? There are plenty of positives if you just put the negatives to one side and just get on with it. I found it a very enjoyable experience when I recently shared worship in person with another fellowship.

After going through this crisis, I think we don't take so much for granted now. We appreciate more of what we've got, for example, a nice home, friends and all the trees and all the greenery; nature.

And I appreciate all my Hearsall friends. I send you my love and my prayers and I hope to see you all before too long.

Thanks so much Jean. Inspired by you, we will embrace the plentiful positives, put the negatives to one side and just get on with it!

God has come among us, yet sometimes we feel far from him. Our next song expresses our heart's desire to be following him truly in our day to day lives. *As the deer pants for the water, so my soul runs after you...*

**Song (WT 22) *As the deer pants for the water***

As the deer pants for the water,  
So my soul longs after you.  
You alone are my heart's desire  
And I long to worship you.

**Chorus**

*You alone are my strength, my shield.*

*To you alone, may my spirit yield.*

*You alone are my heart's desire*

*And I long to worship you.*

You're my friend and you are my brother,

Even though you are a King.

I love you more than any other,

So much more than anything.

**Chorus**

I want you more than gold or silver,

Only you can satisfy.

You alone are the real joy-giver

And the apple of my eye.

**Chorus**

Our prayers of intercession this week are led by our dear friend and deacon, Jan Clemons.

There is a response in our intercession prayers today. When I say '**Lord in your mercy**' the response will be '**hear our prayer.**'

Loving Lord, as we pray in our individual homes, our towns and cities, our nation and all those nations around the world, we give thanks that we are all one united family in your love. Please give us hope, Lord, as humanity seems to be at a crossroads and we pray that it is only by working together on a global level that we can respond to this pandemic which has caused and continues to cause huge suffering. Please, Lord, help us all to realise that the whole world is sharing this threat and we pray that this will give us a greater sense that we are all in this together.

**Lord in your mercy – hear our prayer.**

We pray especially for

- Those that are worried and stressed, as further restrictions to alleviate the second wave of Covid 19 means that people's freedom is further compromised.
- Parents who are worried about their children's return to school or starting university.
- Young people who worry too, as tensions in families increase.
- Family members who can't visit their parents, siblings, children or grandchildren.
- Those people who have had to put their plans on hold due to local lockdowns.
- Those who, at the end of the furlough scheme, face an uncertain future.
- Those struggling to keep their businesses going especially in the retail and hospitality sectors.

**Lord in your mercy – hear our prayer.**

We will now silently pray for those people and those concerns that are in our hearts and minds.

Lastly, we also pray for the future of all life on your precious planet, Lord, as the signs of climate change become more apparent. The devastating wildfires especially in California, fires in the arctic still burning for over a year, the drought in Eastern Africa, the floods in SE Asia, the extinction of numerous species and the melting of Greenland's ice sheet are very worrying. We pray that we can learn from our global approach to the pandemic and that it is only by nations working together that we can ensure development is sustainable and that biodiversity can be restored. We pray for all nations to take actions which improve the health of their people and their environment and give us the strength to continue to protect your creation, even when we appear to be ignored by others.

**Lord in your mercy – hear our prayer.**

**AMEN**

And we thank Jan for those prayers.

Offering

We are so thankful for all of you who have been able to continue supporting the church financially during this time of pandemic. Some give by standing order; some

make special arrangements for cash donations to be shared. However you give, thank you.

Lord Jesus, you left the riches of heaven and gave us your very self... Accept the gifts we offer to church and charity, and also the offering of our hearts and lives, so that your kingdom may come among us. Amen.

### Bible readings

#### **Philippians 2: 1 - 13**

##### *Imitating Christ's humility*

**2** Therefore if you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any common sharing in the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, **2** then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind. **3** Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, **4** not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others.

**5** In your relationships with one another, have the same mind-set as Christ Jesus:

**6** who, being in very nature<sup>[a]</sup> God,

did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage;

**7** rather, he made himself nothing

by taking the very nature<sup>[b]</sup> of a servant,

being made in human likeness.

**8** And being found in appearance as a man,

he humbled himself

by becoming obedient to death –

even death on a cross!

**9** Therefore God exalted him to the highest place

and gave him the name that is above every name,

**10** that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow,

in heaven and on earth and under the earth,

**11** and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord,

to the glory of God the Father.

*Do everything without grumbling*

<sup>12</sup> Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed – not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence – continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, <sup>13</sup> for it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfil his good purpose.

**Matthew 21: 23 - 32**

*The authority of Jesus questioned*

<sup>23</sup> Jesus entered the temple courts, and, while he was teaching, the chief priests and the elders of the people came to him. ‘By what authority are you doing these things?’ they asked. ‘And who gave you this authority?’

<sup>24</sup> Jesus replied, ‘I will also ask you one question. If you answer me, I will tell you by what authority I am doing these things. <sup>25</sup> John’s baptism – where did it come from? Was it from heaven, or of human origin?’

They discussed it among themselves and said, ‘If we say, “From heaven”, he will ask, “Then why didn’t you believe him?” <sup>26</sup> But if we say, “Of human origin” – we are afraid of the people, for they all hold that John was a prophet.’

<sup>27</sup> So they answered Jesus, ‘We don’t know.’

Then he said, ‘Neither will I tell you by what authority I am doing these things.’

*The parable of the two sons*

<sup>28</sup> ‘What do you think? There was a man who had two sons. He went to the first and said, “Son, go and work today in the vineyard.”

<sup>29</sup> “I will not,” he answered, but later he changed his mind and went.

<sup>30</sup> ‘Then the father went to the other son and said the same thing. He answered, “I will, sir,” but he did not go.

<sup>31</sup> ‘Which of the two did what his father wanted?’

‘The first,’ they answered.

Jesus said to them, 'Truly I tell you, the tax collectors and the prostitutes are entering the kingdom of God ahead of you. <sup>32</sup> For John came to you to show you the way of righteousness, and you did not believe him, but the tax collectors and the prostitutes did. And even after you saw this, you did not repent and believe him.

Jesus' parable is very simple. Some say they will serve God, but don't. Some say they won't serve God, but do. Perhaps the best thing is to say we will serve God and to follow through by serving him in our actions of kindness to others. We sing, *I will worship...* but as we do so, we know that to worship is not merely to sing a song, but to choose to live lives faithful to the gospel's call.

### Song (WT 200) **I will worship**

#### Verse 1

I will worship (I will worship)  
With all of my heart. (with all of my heart.)  
I will praise You (I will praise You)  
With all of my strength. (all my strength.)

I will seek You (I will seek You)  
All of my days. (all of my days.)  
I will follow (I will follow)  
All of Your ways. (all Your ways.)

#### *Chorus*

*I will give You all my worship,  
I will give You all my praise.  
You alone I long to worship,  
You alone are worthy of my praise.*

#### Verse 2

I will bow down (I will bow down)  
And hail You as King. (and hail You as King.)  
I will serve You; (I will serve You;)  
Give You everything. (everything)

I will lift up (I will lift up)  
My eyes to Your throne. (my eyes to Your throne.)  
I will trust You, (I will trust You,)  
Trust You alone. (You alone)

*Chorus X2*

*I will give You all my worship,  
I will give You all my praise.  
You alone I long to worship,  
You alone are worthy of my praise.*

And now may the words recorded earlier this week, and the reflections of our hearts, be acceptable in your sight, O Lord our rock and our redeemer.

Sermon

### ***The follow-through***

Many in our country and in the western world find it hard to consider seriously the claims of Christian faith. Christianity may be rejected for many reasons. I have had long chats with two unbelievers this week about these matters, both men.

The first was hung up by all the evil in the world. He had encountered various sorts of violence first hand and was painfully aware of how wicked people can become. How could he take seriously the claims that a God of love was in charge? The second felt that religion was simply a set of rules made by men - and it usually was men. These rules were made for their own advantage and varied for their own convenience. How could they be anything to do with an objectively real divinity?

In other settings I've known people to reject Christianity because they strongly associate it with all sorts of historical evils: from colonialism, to patriarchy; from a cavalier attitude to a perishing planet, to homophobia; from ugly fundamentalism, to a superior attitude to people belonging to other religions or to none...

Now all of these objections have responses. Much of what others reject in Christianity, we ourselves reject, certainly at Hearsall. So, how can we explain and demonstrate the reality of our faith in such a sceptical environment?

And now the world is faced by a global pandemic, and scientists are very concerned about the spread of a deadly virus in our country, in the second wave. Why bother with religion at such a crucial time? What have Christians got to bring along that helps, when our nation and our world are threatened by the invisible enemy of Covid-19?

The celebrated poem at the centre of our reading from Philippians is seriously offered as a template for a Christian lifestyle. The relationships believers have with one another are to have the same mind-set as Christ Jesus.

I am no golfer, but I am told the follow-through on a drive is vital. A confident stroke will hit the ball with such power and conviction that inevitably the club swings smooth and high after the ball has flown. A poor golfer, I suppose, scuffs the stroke, makes a weaker connection, and this is seen in the more weak and wobbly arc of the club after the ball has been hit.

The swing of salvation is seen in the arc and the follow-through of the famous poem of Christ's saving work in Philippians. Christ, who was in the form of God, swung down from his rightful place in the eternal mystery of heaven, laying aside his rights, not defending forcefully what was properly his, not using his divinity to remain aloof from human suffering, but taking the human form, and a low human form at that, even the form of a slave, following-through on the extraordinary mission of salvation to the extent that to fulfil the plan he became naked, despised, rejected, ridiculed, shamed, condemned, tortured and executed... so that he could plunder the very depths of all that hell could offer and draw the sting of hatred and sin and all the evil that humanity could devise or imagine, and arise on the Third Day... so that anyone with spiritual perception would be silent, and tremble, and so that one day every sentient creature would bow before him, that every speaking being would declare that Jesus is Lord, to the glory of God the Father...

The prisoner Paul, writing or dictating in his chains, when a lesser man might have cursed his rotten luck, seriously asks the fellowship in faraway Philippi to model their church culture, the outworking of their faith, on Christ's sacrificial and unselfish and humble and bold and daring passage through the great swing of salvation.

As a part of that follow-through for the Christians, Paul tells them to *work out their salvation*. And do this *with fear and trembling...* This does not refer to a cowering dread of a defeated victim, but to the awe-struck wonder of an amazed beneficiary. What God has done in Christ is so completely astounding, that we tremble as the old song puts it:

*Were you there when they crucified my Lord?  
O sometimes it causes me to tremble,  
tremble, tremble...*

And so, astounded by what God has done: follow it through, in your church life, follow it through in your personal relationships, follow it through in your community service and your work, follow it through in your outreach.

The model of Jesus relinquishing his claims of authority and privilege, and coming as a suffering servant, humble and gentle in spirit, shows us how to meet many of the objections to faith that people bring. Christianity as a religion needs not to sit on its laurels and defend the indefensible, but humbly to repent of its historical associations with such things as forced conversions, racism, and patriarchy. And, as we collectively repent, we do so with conviction and confidence knowing that the follow-through will come, just as Christ rose on the third day and ascended to the right hand of the Father.

And so, my dear friends, Jesus' humility must guide the culture of our little church. Be like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and mind. Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. For anyone who has grasped the slightest hint of God's swing of salvation must surely lay aside their own little agendas and leave selfish ambitions at the door of the church. Ours is a community of love and of service...

And ours is a community of honesty... Continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling... With awe and wonder, trembling with holy joy, we must work it out, live it out. We reject patriarchy, sexism, homophobia, greed, environmental carelessness, empire-building, Anglo-Saxon arrogance, religious stupidity, fundamentalism...

But is it time to consider and pray together and work together and ask the question: *So what do we believe?* How do the treasures of the gospel get expressed in our generation? And when we know this – well, **that is what we inhabit, and proclaim.** We are not to defend the indefensible, clinging to a 19th century version of religion, sexed up with a few modern songs. We must have the courage to bring what we secretly believe into the light and to work out with fear and trembling what form the great tree of Christianity properly takes in 21st century soil. This is an endeavour of the intellect, of the arts, of the spirit, and of community life. I think it is high time that we did this, to follow through on our faith, and to work out our salvation. If we do this honestly and thoroughly and well, then Hearsall may not be a sleepy declining church in an insignificant midlands suburb, but a fresh, creative and vibrant community where people of good will discover the meaning of life, the pearl of great price.

I also mentioned the covid crisis in my introduction and I want to finish with that in a longish conclusion.

Christians do not sit outside the covid crisis, thinking that our ticket to heaven is safe, and that many of us are not long for this world anyway. No, no! Like Christ we enter this world with humility and love... We embody the extraordinary and breath-taking claims of Christ's presence even in the very depths of hell, by being fully alongside our neighbours, our friends, our nation in three ways:

- 1. We suffer with them.**
- 2. We promote the public good.**
- 3. And we offer hope.**

#### **1 We suffer with them.**

We are not virus-deniers. People we have loved as a fellowship have been taken by covid. Friends of friends have suffered. On behalf of you all, I have ministered sometimes with those bereaved by covid, as have some of you.

This virus is lamentable. It has cost many lives in the UK and beyond, and is restricting our freedoms. Now, it may be valid to hold the government to account, but broadly our attitude as humble believers is to support our government right now in their impossible and thankless task of balancing disease control with the need for

economic growth. To pray for them. Even to sympathise with them, whatever our politics, in their delicate balancing act between public health and economic growth.

This virus is lamentable. If we know those who are sick, we support them in whatever way we can, whether by shopping, praying or calling them up for a chat. If we know those who are bereaved, we offer no easy answers, but we weep with those who weep and mourn with those who mourn.

We cry out to God for a breakthrough in the struggle with this virus. Yes, we have recognised positive spiritual and social side-effects, but at its core this sickness is leading to much premature dying, loneliness and poverty. Yes, we will find the gifts of 2020, but still, at its heart is a gross affront to human life, well-being, community and dignity. So yes, we suffer with those who suffer.

## **2 We promote the public good.**

Let me ask you a question: Do you have Covid-19? Well I very much hope not, *but unless you had a negative test result five minutes ago, the answer may be Yes.* You might.

And, called to be good citizens, it is for us to model a good attitude and good practice with reference to disease control. You may or may not agree with the package of measures that have been put in place. Christians will follow them, not bending the rules for personal convenience, but upholding the rule of law and respecting the national strategy enough to follow it through.

But, more than that, Christians will have an intelligent and helpful attitude to disease control that goes beyond what the rules simply require. We know how this disease may spread. For all I know, I may have covid now, even though I have no symptoms. So I need to be careful.

And, if I am young, I must not adopt the attitude that, well, if I get it, it will only be mild and I'll probably pull through. *Why? Because this is not about me; this is about Us.* It's not about me personally assessing my risks and deciding to take my chances... because my decisions impact on so many more. So, within reason, and with a kind heart, we do what we can to show, in our attitude and in our actions, that we do not want the virus to spread. I may survive an infection. But it's not about me. It's about Us.

And so we challenge lunatic conspiracy theories, anti-mask brigades and online nonsense about the government harvesting DNA during covid tests. And when people break the rules on social distancing, we do not weakly acquiesce, but gently explain that, for the common good, we must stay 2 metres from each other, or 1 metre plus.

### **3 We offer hope.**

Christ's love is unending, broad, deep, long... He left the realms of glory to suffer with us and redeem us from sin... And God exalted him to the highest place...

Well, in our hearts we stubbornly remain people of love. We know that real love suffers long, bears all things and rescues sinners from the prisons of hell, and selfishness, sickness and death. We dare to hope that, for those who die, an everlasting home awaits them, and we comfort the dying with the death-defying love of Christ.

Christmas is coming. So, how shall we celebrate Christmas hope during the time of Covid?

We have a little time to work it out. How shall we use Christmas, respecting all rules on disease control, to express our conviction that Christ walks among us in our suffering, and that hope need never be abandoned?

Shall we have a carol service... Yes of course, so whether on-line, or in some strange socially-distanced event at church, or both, let us begin preparations.

We have the most amazing musicians producing great music for our online services week by week. Musicians and singers, please, don't wait, begin creating and mixing and recording some amazing Christmas music for Hearsall. Poets and sketch writers, take up your pens. Technicians, have a think and a pray - shall we use video? People who create visual beauty, flower arrangers and candle-lighters and the like, start considering, how can we share beauty during a covid Christmas?

And community-builders... What can we do to show we are with those who struggle through this Christmas? If we can't run a Christmas community meal at church, as almost certainly we can't, what can we do then? If families can't get together, how can we offer support? It's time to work it out. To work out our salvation with fear and

trembling in the situation we are in today... To follow-through on the faith we sing about, with honest statements of why we have hope, and wonderful acts of sharing his love.

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

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

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

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

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

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

#### The Grace

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ;  
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.