

4th October 2020

Hearsall at Home

Hello, and welcome to Hearsall at Home.

I hope you are ready to devote this next hour to God in prayer, reflection and listening. After worship on Sunday you are invited to share fellowship in my Zoom

Room 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 most holy God who welcomes us with tender mercy and love.

Order of Service 4th October 2020

Keeping the Faith

Call to Worship

Jeremiah 31: 31 - 34

31 'The days are coming,' declares the Lord,
 'when I will make a new covenant
with the people of Israel
 and with the people of Judah.

32 It will not be like the covenant
 I made with their ancestors
when I took them by the hand
 to lead them out of Egypt,
because they broke my covenant,
 though I was a husband to them,'
declares the Lord.

33 'This is the covenant that I will make with the people of Israel
 after that time,' declares the Lord.
'I will put my law in their minds
 and write it on their hearts.
I will be their God,
 and they will be my people.

34 No longer will they teach their neighbour,
 or say to one another, "Know the Lord,"
because they will all know me,
 from the least of them to the greatest,'
declares the Lord.

'For I will forgive their wickedness
 and will remember their sins no more.'

We sing in worship to our ever Faithful Lord...

Hymn (BPW 68) **Praise to the Lord, the Almighty, the King of Creation**

Praise to the Lord, the Almighty, the King of creation;
O my soul, praise Him, for He is your health and salvation:
All those who hear, brothers and sisters, draw near,
Praise Him in glad adoration.

Praise to the Lord, above all things so wondrously reigning,
Bearing you high on His wings, and so gently sustaining;
Have you not seen all you have needed has been
Met by his gracious providing?

Praise to the Lord, Who shall prosper your work and defend you;
Surely His goodness and mercy shall daily attend you.
Ponder anew what the Almighty can do,
Who with His love will befriend you.

Praise to the Lord, O let all that is in me adore Him!
All that has life and breath, come now with praises before Him.
Let the Amen sound from His people again;
Gladly we praise and adore Him.

Psalm 19

The heavens declare the glory of God;
the skies proclaim the work of his hands.

2 Day after day they pour forth speech;
night after night they reveal knowledge.

3 They have no speech, they use no words;
no sound is heard from them.

4 Yet their voice goes out into all the earth,
their words to the ends of the world.

In the heavens God has pitched a tent for the sun.

5 It is like a bridegroom coming out of his chamber,
like a champion rejoicing to run his course.

6 It rises at one end of the heavens
and makes its circuit to the other;
nothing is deprived of its warmth.

7 The law of the Lord is perfect,
refreshing the soul.

The statutes of the Lord are trustworthy,
making wise the simple.

8 The precepts of the Lord are right,
giving joy to the heart.

The commands of the Lord are radiant,
giving light to the eyes.

9 The fear of the Lord is pure,
enduring for ever.

The decrees of the Lord are firm,
and all of them are righteous.

10 They are more precious than gold,
than much pure gold;
they are sweeter than honey,
than honey from the honeycomb.

11 By them your servant is warned;
in keeping them there is great reward.

12 But who can discern their own errors?
Forgive my hidden faults.

13 Keep your servant also from wilful sins;
may they not rule over me.

Then I will be blameless,
innocent of great transgression.

14 May these words of my mouth and this meditation of my heart
be pleasing in your sight,
Lord, my Rock and my Redeemer.

The Lord's Prayer

Our Father, who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy Name,
thy kingdom come,
thy will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those
who trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom,
and the power, and the glory,
for ever and ever. Amen.

Meditation

The Peacock, by Carmen Bernos de Gasztold, translated by Rumer Godden

A royal train Lord
more scintillating
than jewelled enamel.
Look,
now I spread it in a wheel.
I must say I derive
some satisfaction
from my good looks.
My feathers
are sown with eyes
Admiring themselves.
True,
my discordant cry
shames me a little -
and it is humiliating

to make me remember
my meagre heart.
Your world is badly made,
if I may say so;
the nightingale's voice
in me
would be properly attired -
and soothe my soul.
Lord,
let a day come,
a heavenly day,
when my inner and outer selves
will be reconciled
in perfect harmony.
Amen.

So we learn from the peacock to yearn for a beautiful soul matched by a beautiful body, a beautiful voice and a beautiful life... Well, we may not be as pretty as a peacock or as good looking as an octopus, but we have a heart, and a smile, and we are God's own children... Let's release our inner animal and sing, If I were a butterfly...

Song (WT 203) **If I were a Butterfly**

If I were a butterfly,
I'd thank you Lord for giving me wings.
If I were a robin in a tree,
I'd thank you Lord that I could sing.
If I were a fish in the sea,
I'd wiggle my tail and I'd giggle with glee
But I just thank you Father for making me, me.

Chorus

*For you gave me a heart
And you gave me a smile,
You gave me Jesus
And you made me your child,
And I just thank you Father
For making me, me.*

If I were an elephant,
I'd thank you Lord by raising my trunk.
If I were a kangaroo,
You know I'd hop right up to you.
If I were an octopus,
I'd thank you Lord for my fine looks
But I just thank you Father for making me, me.

Chorus

If I were a wiggly worm,
I'd thank you Lord that I could squirm,
And if I were a fuzzy, wuzzy bear,
I'd thank you Lord for my fuzzy, wuzzy hair.
If I were a crocodile,
I'd thank you Lord for my great smile,
But I just thank you Father for making me, me.

Chorus

Well I had a cancellation so I decided to do **Door Ajar** myself...

My experience of the last six months has been by turns rich, challenging, dark, bright, tedious and quite extraordinary. As a Christian it has given me more time to be sure to read the Bible and pray each morning, often practising the stillness of contemplative prayer as my core spiritual discipline.

Early on my life was very tough. One relationship came to an end. My house was in chaos - I had no working kitchen. I took it into my head to start redecorating my

lounge. How I coped I am unsure! I am happy to say that now I have a great new kitchen and a lounge displaying a couple of Chagall prints to good effect.

To be frank, I have enjoyed developing these audio-files for worship each Sunday. It's been stimulating to experiment with different forms of preaching, as I did when I recorded at Draycote Water. It's been fascinating to pray and reflect and study on the essentials of church... I try to make lots of pastoral phone calls and to join in the Thursday walks. What really matters may be seen more clearly as we go through this dark time.

I am proud of the high quality of the services we as a team produce. The music is often sublime. The Door Ajar features are great. The technology, seamless. The prayers are so thoughtful. And the sermons have been just about okay... In all seriousness I think we have developed a product worth sharing more widely, and I am encouraged when some of you tell me you are doing exactly that.

More recently I have begun to find church during covid a bit harder work. I am starting to yearn for a live congregation, and for a no-holds-barred singing of worship songs in company with you all. I know that an audio file is not what everyone needs and I begin to fear that the congregation may disperse to other churches where in-person worship of a sorts is being offered.

At a personal level I feel so blessed now, it is almost embarrassing. During covid I was given a new grand-daughter with the majestic name of Sapphire Rose. This means that now I have four adult children, each with a lovely partner, three of them married, and five healthy, happy grandchildren. Since bubbles came in, I have spent a lot of time with my lovely daughter, Kate, and her family who live on the same street as me. Each Wednesday I collect little Asher and Iriana from school - what a delight! And I also drive to Bristol and Sheffield to catch up with my other children and grandchildren.

I have also fallen head-over-heels in love with a beautiful Australian lady called Rachel - it's a long and rather wonderful story that merits its own podcast. And I love meeting up with church family and lovely local friends in various outdoor places or gardens.

My friendships continue to grow, though because of my nomadic lifestyle my longest-standing friends are in faraway places. So I spend time on video calls, and WhatsApp messages. But I tend to regard all of you as friends, and some of those friendships have perhaps become closer during this time.

Finally, I am beginning to realise that this is a great opportunity to take part more actively in the wider church movements towards a reconstructed church of faith, hope, inclusion, and expressions of faith that are compelling and credible to a new generation and life-affirming and honest and lovely... So I am starting to listen to the podcasts produced by some key Christian thinkers today.

Well that's a bit of a snapshot of my life at the moment. If you've got any questions about any of it, just give me a call... drop me an email, WhatsApp me, video call me or bump into me on the walk on Thursday. Oh no, you mustn't bump into me; we stay two metres away from each other. But our hearts are one.

Bless you all my friends. Bye!

Our intercessions this week are led by our dear friend Cynthia Baker.

This prayer has a response.

When I say: 'Bless our day to day world' the response is: '**Bless our day to day people**'

Dear Lord and Father of all humanity, we bring our prayers to you not just for this special day but for every day, the everyday world in which we try to follow you from dawn to dusk, and often lose our way. But in this day-to-day world we depend utterly on so many people you give us. In our prayers we celebrate them, thank you for them, and pray for their well being.

Bless our day-to-day world – **Bless our day-to-day people**

When we get up in the morning we depend on workers in the water industry to supply us with water for the shower, power workers who enable us to turn on the light and the kettle, radio broadcasters who give us instant information about the day's news, and so many others. Thank you Father for each one - for their skill, judgement and willingness to get up early!

Bless our day-to-day world – **Bless our day-to-day people**

As the day gets under way, we depend on transport workers who run train and bus services and maintain our road system: we depend on shop workers who provide for our necessities and our whims; we depend on gardeners who keep our parks and flower beds beautiful, and street cleaners who keep our streets usable; we depend on IT maintenance teams to keep our computers running. Thank you Father for each one - for their contribution to the complex web of support that keeps us all on the road.

Bless our day-to-day world – **Bless our day-to-day people**

As the day wears on, we depend on the long chain of supply that brings coffee from south America to our kitchen or our desk; we depend on telephone engineers who keep us in touch with everybody else; we depend on the underpaid people who run sandwich shops and eating places; we depend on sewage workers who perform a vital task. Thank you Father for this army of people who enable us to get on with what we have to do.

Bless our day-to-day world – **Bless our day-to-day people**

We come towards the evening. We've depended on teachers, now working in very difficult and complex ways, to equip our children for life, medical staff who are working so tirelessly in this pandemic, and still are ready for all our illnesses and accidents, writers who've prepared scripts for the evening's TV, cleaners who now go through our offices and places of work. So many people; so much we take for granted. Thank you Father for the gifts we all bring to the engines of our society and the health of our nation.

Bless our day-to-day world – **Bless our day-to-day people**

And bless, Lord, also, those who now stand and wait, those who stay at home, their working days at an end. Enable them to value the dignity of rest, the wisdom of experience and the possibilities of the Third Age. For all of us are in your hands, and the web of life is incomplete without any of us.

So Lord, bless your world; bless it with kindness and hope, and bring it finally to completion in Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen

Thanks, Cynthia, for leading our prayers.

Let's sing a song celebrating the utter faithfulness of God's love. We may be fickle, we may be weak, we may be broken: God's faithful love is constantly available to those with a heart of simple trust.

Song (WT 80) **Faithful One**

Verse

Faithful One, so unchanging;
Ageless One, you're my rock of peace.
Lord of all, I depend on you;
I call out to you again and again,
I call out to you, again and again.

Chorus

*You are my rock in times of trouble,
You lift me up when I fall down.
All through the storm
Your love is the anchor.
My hope is in you alone.*

Repeat Verse

Chorus

Offering

For the Christian, giving is not a burden but a joy. In sharing our resources, we share in the great work of the kingdom of love, and we recognise that all we have comes from him, and belongs to him.

O Lord, grant us generous hearts and use our gifts that your kingdom may come.
Amen.

Bible Readings

Genesis 15

The Lord's covenant with Abram

15 After this, the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision:

Do not be afraid, Abram.

I am your shield,
your very great reward.'

² But Abram said, 'Sovereign LORD, what can you give me since I remain childless and the one who will inherit my estate is Eliezer of Damascus?' ³ And Abram said, 'You have given me no children; so a servant in my household will be my heir.'

⁴ Then the word of the LORD came to him: 'This man will not be your heir, but a son who is your own flesh and blood will be your heir.' ⁵ He took him outside and said, 'Look up at the sky and count the stars – if indeed you can count them.' Then he said to him, 'So shall your offspring be.'

⁶ Abram believed the LORD, and he credited it to him as righteousness.

⁷ He also said to him, 'I am the LORD, who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldeans to give you this land to take possession of it.'

⁸ But Abram said, 'Sovereign LORD, how can I know that I shall gain possession of it?'

⁹ So the LORD said to him, 'Bring me a heifer, a goat and a ram, each three years old, along with a dove and a young pigeon.'

¹⁰ Abram brought all these to him, cut them in two and arranged the halves opposite each other; the birds, however, he did not cut in half. ¹¹ Then birds of prey came down on the carcasses, but Abram drove them away.

¹² As the sun was setting, Abram fell into a deep sleep, and a thick and dreadful darkness came over him. ¹³ Then the LORD said to him, 'Know for certain that for four hundred years your descendants will be strangers in a country not their own and that they will be enslaved and ill-treated there. ¹⁴ But I will punish the nation they serve as slaves, and afterwards they will come out with great possessions. ¹⁵ You, however, will go to your ancestors in peace and be buried at a good old age. ¹⁶ In the fourth generation your descendants will come back here, for the sin of the Amorites has not yet reached its full measure.'

¹⁷ When the sun had set and darkness had fallen, a smoking brazier with a blazing torch appeared and passed between the pieces. ¹⁸ On that day the LORD made a covenant with Abram and said, 'To your descendants I give this land, from the Wadi of Egypt to the great river, the Euphrates – ¹⁹ the land of the Kenites, Kenizzites, Kadmonites, ²⁰ Hittites, Perizzites, Rephaites, ²¹ Amorites, Canaanites, Girgashites and Jebusites.'

Philippians 3: 4 -14

⁴ If someone else thinks they have reasons to put confidence in the flesh, I have more: ⁵ circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee; ⁶ as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for righteousness based on the law, faultless.

⁷ But whatever were gains to me I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. ⁸ What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them garbage, that I may gain Christ ⁹ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ – the righteousness that comes from God on the basis of faith. ¹⁰ I want to know Christ – yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, ¹¹ and so, somehow, attaining to the resurrection from the dead.

¹² Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already arrived at my goal, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. ¹³ Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: forgetting what is behind and straining towards what is ahead, ¹⁴ I press on towards the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenwards in Christ Jesus.

The journey through life brings us challenges: grief, fear, loneliness, rage, envy and more may come our way. Let us pray for a pilgrim's heart to meet life's difficulties with constant faith. We sing John Bunyan's classic pilgrim hymn...

Hymn (BPW 362) **We Who Would Valiant Be**

We who would valiant be

'Gainst all disaster,

Let us in constancy
Follow the Master.
There's no discouragement
Shall make us once relent
Our first avowed intent
To be a pilgrim.

Who so beset us round
With dismal stories,
Do but themselves confound,
Our strength the more is.
No foes shall stay his might,
Though we with giants fight.
We will make good our right
To be a pilgrim.
Since, Lord, Thou dost defend
Us with Thy Spirit,
We know we at the end
Shall life inherit.
Then fancies flee away,
We'll fear not what men say,
We'll labour night and day
To be a pilgrim.

May these words of my mouth and this meditation of my heart
be pleasing in your sight, Lord, my Rock and my Redeemer.
Amen.

Sermon

Keeping the Faith

Sometimes, life is hard and the darkness rises around us like a flood tide.

Sometimes it's a personal story: the end of a life blighted by dementia; a breakdown in a relationship; or a struggle with mental illness.

Sometimes it's an inner conflict: a growing dissatisfaction with some aspect of life, like our job, our family or our faith tradition.

Sometimes it's a shared experience, as this week, we heard that the worldwide official death toll from covid passed one million.

All of these darkneses can come together... The suffering of the peoples of the earth, blighted by a pandemic, are also our own sufferings. We too, may be cowed by the gloom of a diminished life... Community, family, church are all curtailed... Love itself can seem to be swallowed by a thick darkness that seeps into the recesses of our soul.

Modern people often try to dispel the sense of darkness in their lives. We can displace it with activity, noise and busy-ness.

But ancient wisdom and modern psychology say that the best way through a dark spell is to find God and truth and life, not in the denial of the pain, but within its very agony; not in the pretence that everything is okay, but in an honest expression of the feelings we feel.

When my wife Ruth passed away two years and eight months ago, I wrote poetry. This was not to distract myself, but to explore the pain, to feel it, to express it. Where was God in that time of darkness? God was precisely **in** that time of darkness. Where is God when it hurts? God is *in our response to the experience of pain*.

Well, I may be vain enough to fancy myself as an amateur poet, but what sustained me through bereavement was this: learning to walk through the valley of the shadow of death with my eyes wide open. Feeling what I felt. Writing it down. Bursting the bitter fruit against the roof of my mouth. Expressing it openly. Through walking in the darkness open-eyed, I believe I have received in a large measure, the healing of God.

I don't say we should all write poems, but I do say: don't deny your pain. Where is God when it hurts? God is in the valley of shadows. If we flee away too soon, we might miss a special rendezvous with the lover of our soul.

Wait in the darkness until your eyes can see the stars.

Darkness is used to convey a fearful mood in Genesis 15. Right at the start, Abram is told not to be afraid - so presumably something was freaking him out! And after God reassures him, his fears emerge.

He was childless. This was an unmitigated disaster in ancient cultures. He was a wealthy man, and he had no family to inherit his riches or his name. What compounded the pain was the fact that God had **promised** him children! And here he was, an old man approaching a hundred years of age, in a strange place as the sun set, feeling a deep sense of being let down.

God speaks to him these words: *a son who is your own flesh and blood will be your heir...*

But a deeper reassurance comes as Abram stands and witnesses the darkness arising around him. As the sky turns inky black, the celestial river of the Milky Way, and the stars shining like jewels can be seen, and these stars speak to him... So shall his descendants be. In the darkness God is present. Through the darkness, God speaks.

In a place where not much can be seen, Abram keeps the faith. Abram believed the Lord, and God regarded Abram's trusting in the darkness, as righteousness.

Verse 7 could be a flashback to earlier that evening or it may even be another night. But again, Abram feels his uncertainty and needs reassurance. *Will his descendants really possess the Promised Land?* This time, a strange ritual is proposed involving a heifer, a goat, a ram, a dove and a pigeon.

Perhaps now we readers are in the dark, as commentators can only speculate as to the meaning of all this. Is it a forerunner of animal sacrifice? Well maybe, but then we would expect the animals to be burnt on an altar. Why were the animals bisected and the birds left whole? Why were the animals to be three years old? What, if anything, do the descending birds of prey represent? We can't be sure.

On this night too, the darkness rises for Abram, but this time it's a darkness within him. He tumbles into a dreadful darkness as he falls deeply asleep. Into this dreadful darkness, God speaks again, as Abram rests in his profound stupor: Know for certain that the fate of your ancestors is to be slaves and then experience liberation,

and possess the land... and know for certain that you will live to a ripe old age and be buried in peace...

And then, whether in a dream or a vision, we hear of a smoking fire-pot with a blazing torch darting between the pieces of the slaughtered animals. Against this deep darkness, the mysterious holiness of God shines brightly. If Abram had denied his pain, avoided the darkness, guarded himself from a deep slumber, he would not have encountered God in this deep and mysterious way. So we might draw this lesson: the dark place is an opportunity to learn to trust God more. If we can keep the faith then, well our trust in God will be all the stronger.

* * *

But then, is there a different kind of darkness when all at the superficial level seems to be going well? I'm talking about a sense of dissatisfaction with life, and particularly with the faith we may have inherited... The Apostle Paul experienced it profoundly when he wrote that all the things he had been proud of: his circumcision, his tribe, his observance of the Law, had become to him to seem like garbage, rubbish, loss. Religious superhero as he was, it all seemed empty.

In 1995 I began training to become a Baptist Minister. There were several colleges where I might train, but I chose to go to Northern Baptist College in Manchester. It was the nearest to me, but I was especially happy because it was a college that encouraged open-minded exploration, and stimulated students to deconstruct their faith and find what really mattered to them. Everything could be questioned, and whilst not everyone might appreciate that, for me I was at last finding a way of interrogating the faith, and being honest about the things I found hard to accept.

But when we question Christian faith, might we not lose it altogether? We may enter a kind of darkness of unknowing.

An anonymous medieval English Christian wrote a spiritual classic called *The Cloud of Unknowing*. This writer encouraged a person in prayer to put aside all their ideas and knowledge of God, with a view to encountering the reality of God in a kind of mental darkness.

Modern Christian writers like Baptist minister, Steve Chalke, question much of what traditional evangelical Christianity holds as true. According to thinkers like him,

Christians need not believe that gay relationships are bad, that only Christians get to heaven, that other religions are completely false.

Many in our church would, perhaps, share in the trajectory of this journey. But so often it is expressed in negative terms as I just did. We know what we **don't** believe, but may be less clear what we do believe. Does this leave us in a kind of darkness? Well our reading from Philippians attempts to answer this: Yes, so much of Paul's religion seemed like rubbish compared with... *the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord*. Paul was prepared to regard all his religious efforts as worthless, to jettison the lot, if only... What? If only he could *gain Christ, be found in him...*

Perhaps Paul's experience was like falling in love... He found in Christ such an overwhelming satisfaction that really nothing else mattered. Jesus seemed so bright that everything else was darkness.

*So I want to **know** Christ...* he says... He wants to get life right - to be righteous... not by his religion, but by a deep relationship, a profound trust.

He seems to be expressing the sense not only of a deep relationship with God, but also with life itself. He yearned to be passionate, to share in Christ's sufferings, even in his death, to be so united with Christ that the darkness of suffering can be endured, and even that the darkness of death itself is not a problem.

It takes guts to question our faith. It takes courage to keep the faith, even when many previous certainties fall away. Our faith can mature if we are prepared to search for God with honesty, curiosity and a love of life, even when times are tough.

By trusting in the darkness, we may discover that faith is about curiosity, love, wonder, and joy. Paul swapped a religion for a relationship. And some today might want to swap a tired defence of a jaded religious system for a full-bodied relationship with God and a complete embrace of life in all its fullness. The darkness can teach us such things.

So, do you see and feel the darkness today? Hold still. Don't run away or panic. Let the eyes of your heart get used to the darkness. In the silence of the night, listen to the whispered promises of God. When some may fall away in fear, will you be one who keeps the faith?

* * *

Forgive me for sharing one of the poems I referred to earlier. A few months after Ruth died, me and my extended family took a holiday in Barmouth, renting a huge house by a wide estuary. On the last afternoon of the holiday I sat still and tasted what I tasted. Do you think there is anything of God in these words?

High Snug

In Heddwch house, Arthog, Wales

I sit in the window seat of the high snug.
Below, the waters of the estuary are turning.
Though gentle waves approach the house
and upstream currents can yet be discerned,
the general flow now seems to be
away from the land and out to the sea.
The whitish whisper of wind and wave
is sometimes breached by a sea bird's cry.
Silent hills smudge into grey clouds
but flatline down by the wide river's shore.
Sunlit sandbanks are seen again now
and foamy waves break on beaches reborn.

And I conjure you sharing my comfortable bench,
your back leaning on the opposite wall,
our feet resting by each other's thighs,
touched now and then by affectionate hands.
I love to imagine your body still here, though
this physical dream is near too much to bear.

Tonight the waters will rise up again
and the river will gape as wide as a sea
and I know you'd be swimming in its cold embrace
or be doing some task we'd left undone.
You'd not be still with me, softly sensing how
the same old tide returns and returns and returns.

And now we will sing...

Let my soul be as a sponge, soaking up the water of life...

Let my soul be as a drum, forever resonating with the rhythm of your heart...

Let my soul be as boat, coursing on your river of love...

Let my soul be as a child, enfolded in your arms...

Let my soul be as a star, shining as a portent of the king...

Let my soul be truly wild, energised to labour for the way things ought to be...

If we wait in the darkness, the clearest of visions may come, like a torch darting through the fragments of our life... like the majesty of the transcendent stars, only seen because we allowed ourselves to be embraced within the darkness...

Song **Let my Soul be as a Sponge** Words: David Sutcliffe / Music: Martin Prue

1. Let my soul be as a sponge
soaking up the water
of your gentle way of life.
Let my soul be as a drum
forever resonating
with the rhythm of your heart.

Chorus

Your parenting brings confidence!

Your kingship perfect harmony!

Your will is shared prosperity!

Your bread is baked for everyone!

Your pardon cascades liberty!

Oh, rescue me from counterfeits:

I choose to live your way!

I choose to live your way!

2. Let my soul be as a boat

coursing on the current
of the river of your love.
Let my soul be as a child
tenderly enfolded
in the cradle of your arms.

Chorus

Your parenting brings confidence!

Your kingship perfect harmony!

Your will is shared prosperity!

Your bread is baked for everyone!

Your pardon cascades liberty!

Oh, rescue me from counterfeits:

I choose to live your way!

I choose to live your way!

3. Let my soul be as a star
shining as a portent
of the coming of the king!
Let my soul be truly wild,
energised to labour
for the way things ought to be.

Chorus

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.