

29th November 2020: First Sunday of Advent

***Hearsall at Home***

Hello, and welcome to Hearsall at Home. As this is the first Sunday of Advent, you might like to find a candle ready to light with me at the start of our service today.

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.

And now let us wait on God, preparing our hearts for his coming.

Order of Service 29<sup>th</sup> November 2020, 1st Sunday of Advent

***Wake up!***

Advent Candles

Do you have a candle you can light at home, to mark the first Sunday of Advent?

You may want to join in the words in bold below...

We light a first Advent Candle to remind us of the Advent hope - Jesus is coming again!

**The apostle Paul writes: The night is nearly over, the day is almost here. Let us stop doing the things that belong in the dark, and let us take up weapons for fighting in the light.**

Call to Worship

**Psalm 80: 1 - 7**

Hear us, Shepherd of Israel,

you who lead Joseph like a flock.

You who sit enthroned between the cherubim,

shine forth before Ephraim, Benjamin and Manasseh.

Awaken your might;

come and save us.

Restore us, O God;

make your face shine on us,

that we may be saved.

How long, Lord God Almighty,

will your anger smoulder

against the prayers of your people?

You have fed them with the bread of tears;

you have made them drink tears by the bowlful.

You have made us an object of derision to our neighbours,

and our enemies mock us.

Restore us, God Almighty;  
make your face shine on us,  
that we may be saved.

We begin the season of Advent, awaiting God's Salvation. Awaiting our Saviour. Let us sing together, *Come, thou long-expected Jesus...*

Hymn (BPW 139) **Come thou long-expected Jesus**

Come, Thou long-expected Jesus,  
born to set Thy people free;  
from our fears and sins release us;  
let us find our rest in thee.

Israel's strength and consolation,  
hope of all the earth thou art;  
dear desire of every nation,  
joy of every longing heart.

Born thy people to deliver;  
born a child, and yet a king;  
born to reign in us for ever;  
now thy gracious kingdom bring.

By thine own eternal Spirit,  
rule in all our hearts alone:  
by thine all-sufficient merit,  
raise us to thy glorious throne.

Prayer of preparing for Advent (Ashwin, Book of a Thousand Prayers, No 711)

God of all hope and joy,  
open our hearts in welcome,  
that your Son Jesus Christ at his coming  
may find in us a dwelling prepared for himself;

who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,  
one God, now and forever. Amen.

### Prayer of confession

And yet Loving Lord, we are not ready.  
Our minds quickly turn from one concern to another.  
Our spirits are not still enough to be calm waters of peace.  
Our hearts are too closed to be containers of holy love.  
Our muscles are too tense to embody Christ again.  
For all our failings, forgive us for Jesus' sake,  
and help us as we prepare ourselves for his coming. Amen.

### A moment of contemplation

Let's sit still for sixty seconds, and rest in the love of our Lord.  
Take an attentive posture, neither strained nor slouched.  
Tense and relax the muscles of your body.  
To the normal rhythm of your breathing, pray, Come, Lord Jesus!

### 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,  
the power and the glory,  
for ever and ever.  
Amen

In a spirit of prayer, we sing together, *Purify my Heart*.

Song (WT 354) **Purify my heart**

Verse 1

Purify my heart  
Let me be as gold  
And precious silver  
Purify my heart  
Let me be as gold  
Pure gold

*Chorus*

*Refiner's fire  
My heart's one desire  
Is to be holy  
Set apart for You Lord  
I choose to be holy  
Set apart for You my Master  
Ready to do Your will*

Verse 2

Purify my heart  
Cleanse me from within  
And make me holy  
Purify my heart  
Cleanse me from my sin  
Deep within

*Chorus x 2*

*Ending*

*Ready to do Your will*

Well I am thrilled to be able to introduce a lady known to many of us as a good friend of Hearsall, the one and only Ali Bushnell. Ali brings this week's Doors Ajar.

### **Doors Ajar**

First of all, I want to say hello to you all and how lovely it is to be part of your Church service, this is the very Church that I became Mrs Bushnell in back in 2003. I hope you are enjoying it so far.

I want to begin by being honest with you, I have had my ups and downs over the past few months. I am sure that most of you can relate to this because this situation is nothing like I have ever experienced in my life and I didn't know how I was going to cope until I was in it.

I normally work in the city centre at the Uni, which is not too far from home and on Monday 16 March, my boss saw me on campus and told me to work from home until further notice and a week later, we were in lockdown.

Working from home is not a hardship for me as I am used to remote working, which is the term they use these days. I am fortunate that my job can be done from anywhere – I can be sitting on the surface of the moon and carry on as normal as long as I have a decent internet connection! Mind you, the commute home would take considerably longer than its usual 10 minutes

We are spoilt for choice in the ways we can keep in touch with people. In my working life, my daily meetings are all conducted now on something called Microsoft Teams where you can see and hear the people you're in a meeting with. We also use something called 'Zoom' which in my youth, was a song by Fat Larry's Band but today, it is known as a communications tool where you can hold virtual meetings and conferences – in fact, my niece, Maria Peirce, organised a Murder Mystery Night for the family, which we did on Zoom – it was great fun and we all had to dress up as our characters. I played Lady Iceberg, so I sat by the fridge door for a couple of hours before hand so I could truly get into the role.

We had never done anything like that before and it was fun and brought us all closer together. It was done for the Macmillan charity as we paid a fee to take part. I won't

mention any names, but some of my family members really threw themselves into their roles and as the action was based on board a ship, there were a lot of dodgy sailors on every deck.

Being in lockdown gives you more time to think about family and friends that you miss. My dear Mum passed away in 1993, when I was just 29, and I was thinking that if this kind of technology had been around in her day, she would have loved it. We used to call each other on the phone every day and if she had access to Facebook messenger, WhatsApp video calling or Skype in those days – she'd have been on it all day long!

I would have loved for her to have been able to talk to my brother using these means. He lives in America and it broke her heart the day he emigrated as they were very close. She would have loved to do what I can do now - call him up on my video phone and chat to him while he's sitting on his porch in Mississippi with his wife and their dog – we chat about life, the universe and everything, and unlike a telephone conversation in 1993, it costs nothing – you just need a decent internet connection. I dread to think how much an hour phone call to the States would have cost us in 1993!

So even though we can't be with our loved ones at the moment, we can still stay connected via social media. I can still listen to my brother's bad jokes, which he tells in his weird Stoke/US accent, and I can comment on how grey his hair has gone – which is not good as he's my little brother. When he looks at me during our call, he comments on how much I remind him of our Mum and I tell him, how much he reminds me of our old family dog – annoying and messy. Only kidding, I love him to bits and the video calls make me feel close to him.

The hardest thing for me is the lack of physical contact. I went to see my friend Wendy from the Coventry Cats Protection team a couple of weeks ago as it was her birthday. I went to her house in Wyken, knocked on her door, left the presents on the step and stood well back like I'd just lit a firework.

All I wanted to do was to join her in the house for a cuppa and a slice of birthday cake, but the best we could do was chat over the garden wall in the freezing cold. It was good to see her and we said that we would look forward to the day when we can

meet up for a coffee and a chat about cats and Eurovision (the two things we both have in common).

At least I am benefiting from something that Wendy let me have during lockdown. Our rescue cat Lenny was the first cat in Coventry to be rehomed under the COVID-19 safety guidelines – he was used as the pilot to see if they could rehome cats safely and because our handover was a success, other people in Coventry were allowed to adopt their own fur babies. Did you know that for every cat you adopt, you are actually saving two lives, the life of the cat that comes to live with you and the life of the cat on the street who is able to take his place and be cared for by the charity until he can be rehomed.

Well, that's about it from me. It was lovely to have this opportunity to chat to you and I'll leave you with the message that is on the bottom of every work email I receive from our bosses – stay safe and stay connected.

Thanks Ali for your lovely message today. May God bless you through this season of Advent.

### Prayers of Intercession

Our lovely friend Sandra will now lead our prayers of intercession.

God our Father, we come to You now, although separated by distance, yet held together by Your love shown to us in Jesus Christ. During this time of Covid crisis people from all over the world have come to realize that we are one human race with hopes and fears, challenges and choices. We give thanks that there has been the development of vaccines to bring healing and protection for folk far and near and that Russia too has publically joined in to offer help and support. May the distribution and medical skills of N.H.S. staff and volunteers bring healing and comfort to many now and in the months ahead.

We know that many folk have lost their jobs through this difficult time. Christmas for them, this year will be very hard with young children, not understanding the financial situation having their Christmas lists ready for Santa. There are many who are worried about mortgage repayments, the basic necessities needed to bring up a

young family and the uncertain future as they look towards the New Year. Father, guide those of us who can help, to know where specific needs are; may we keep the Food Banks well stocked and generously support charities that give aid.

We pray for our Government, especially the Chancellor, as he develops financial packages to aid the country through this difficult time. Give all the confidence and the courage as they make decisions that will affect us all now and in the future,

As the lockdown comes to an end this week, we pray that people will be sensible and obey Covid rules as they do their Christmas shopping. May all stay safe and well so that our wonderful N.H.S will not be overwhelmed once again.

This week many of us have been listening to the report of The Grenfell Tower Disaster. We know now that it definitely could have been avoided. We pray for all those who lost loved ones and must now feel angry and distressed. Bring them healing and support now and in the future as they come to terms with the injustice that has been done. We pray too for those fearful because the cladding of their apartments is still unsafe. May the resources be found to replace the danger, so that folk can sleep peacefully and not lie awake afraid and worried.

Father, we pray for our world, for places where there is unrest and civil war. We pray for understanding where there is confusion, for resolution where there is conflict, for forgiveness where there is bitterness and for hope where there is despair.

Strengthen all who are working to restore a world of peace and harmony. Many families have fled with their children from areas of conflict to refugee camps. Although they may feel safe there, the situation in many of the camps is one of chaos and total lack of facilities. As we sit in our warm homes with everything that we need around us, we think of what it would be like to live there with very little hope of a better life. May we seek ways of bringing some help to those who feel there is nothing to look forward to in the future.

We pray for our city—a city where the world is represented. We pray especially for our students at Christmas time, many who are unable to go home. May we, as a church, show friendship and hospitality to as many as we can, even though our homes will not be as “open” as in previous years.

We pray too for many who might not be able to be with their families over Christmas; those who will be alone with no one to laugh or share gifts with. We pray that the Covid barriers will safely come down so that fellowship and fun will be enjoyed by as many as possible.

Bless all those groups who normally use our old building. May they be able to keep in contact with each other through the media. We ask your blessing especially on our Lunch Club folk who are missing each other's company, but we give thanks that they are keeping in touch with each other, and that at present they all seem well.

And we pray for our church congregation. We thank you for all those who help to arrange the Sunday Service and we marvel at the technology which brings us so close together.

Now we will have a time of quiet as we bring to You those who need our special prayers at this time.

Hear our prayers in the name of Jesus Christ, Our Lord and Saviour.

AMEN

Thank you Sandra, for those prayers.

Let's enjoy the sense of anticipation in our next song, *Soon and very soon*.

Song (WT 375) **Soon and very soon**

Hallelujah, hallelujah, we're going to see the King.

Soon and very soon, we are going to see the King.

Soon and very soon, we are going to see the King.

Soon and very soon, we are going to see the King.

Hallelujah, hallelujah, we're going to see the King.

No more crying now, we are going to see the King.

No more crying now, we are going to see the King.

No more crying now, we are going to see the King.

Hallelujah, hallelujah, we're going to see the King.

Hal-le-lu-jah, Hal-le-lu-jah, Hal-le-lu-jah, Hal-le-lu-jah.

No more dying there, we are going to see the King.

No more dying there, we are going to see the King.

No more dying there, we are going to see the King.

Hallelujah, hallelujah, we're going to see the King.

Hal-le-lu-jah, Hal-le-lu-jah, Hal-le-lu-jah, Hal-le-lu-jah.

Soon and very soon, we are going to see the King.

Soon and very soon, we are going to see the King.

Soon and very soon, we are going to see the King.

Hallelujah, hallelujah, we're going to see the King.

Hallelujah, hallelujah, we're going to see the King.

Hallelujah, hallelujah, we're going to see the King.

### Offering

Lord, so many good gifts come to us from your hands. Inspire us to be generous in all our lives, and take our gifts to church and charity to bring your Advent hope into our world. Amen.

### Readings

Today's readings come from Isaiah and also from Mark.

#### **Isaiah 64: 1 - 9**

Oh, that you would rend the heavens and come down,  
that the mountains would tremble before you!

<sup>2</sup> As when fire sets twigs ablaze

and causes water to boil,

come down to make your name known to your enemies

and cause the nations to quake before you!

<sup>3</sup> For when you did awesome things that we did not expect,

you came down, and the mountains trembled before you.

<sup>4</sup> Since ancient times no one has heard,

no ear has perceived,

no eye has seen any God besides you,  
who acts on behalf of those who wait for him.  
<sup>5</sup> You come to the help of those who gladly do right,  
who remember your ways.  
But when we continued to sin against them,  
you were angry.  
How then can we be saved?  
<sup>6</sup> All of us have become like one who is unclean,  
and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags;  
we all shrivel up like a leaf,  
and like the wind our sins sweep us away.  
<sup>7</sup> No one calls on your name  
or strives to lay hold of you;  
for you have hidden your face from us  
and have given us over to our sins.  
<sup>8</sup> Yet you, LORD, are our Father.  
We are the clay, you are the potter;  
we are all the work of your hand.  
<sup>9</sup> Do not be angry beyond measure, LORD;  
do not remember our sins for ever.  
Oh, look upon us we pray,  
for we are all your people.

### **Mark 13: 24-37**

<sup>24</sup> 'But in those days, following that distress,  
"the sun will be darkened,  
and the moon will not give its light;  
<sup>25</sup> the stars will fall from the sky,  
and the heavenly bodies will be shaken."  
<sup>26</sup> 'At that time people will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and  
glory. <sup>27</sup> And he will send his angels and gather his elect from the four winds, from  
the ends of the earth to the ends of the heavens.

<sup>28</sup> 'Now learn this lesson from the fig-tree: as soon as its twigs get tender and its leaves come out, you know that summer is near. <sup>29</sup> Even so, when you see these things happening, you know that it is near, right at the door. <sup>30</sup> Truly I tell you, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened. <sup>31</sup> Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.

*The day and hour unknown*

<sup>32</sup> 'But about that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. <sup>33</sup> Be on guard! Be alert! You do not know when that time will come. <sup>34</sup> It's like a man going away: he leaves his house and puts his servants in charge, each with their assigned task, and tells the one at the door to keep watch.

<sup>35</sup> 'Therefore keep watch because you do not know when the owner of the house will come back – whether in the evening, or at midnight, or when the cock crows, or at dawn. <sup>36</sup> If he comes suddenly, do not let him find you sleeping. <sup>37</sup> What I say to you, I say to everyone: "Watch!"

It's another prophet, Jeremiah, who made the image of the potter and the clay his own. Perhaps Isaiah's use of the image is similar. We are to offer ourselves as malleable clay into the hands of God our Father, the holy potter. Let's sing, *Beautiful Lord*, which employs the same idea in its chorus.

**Song (WT 36) *Beautiful Lord***

Verse 1

Beautiful Lord wonderful Saviour  
I know for sure all of my days are  
Held in Your hand crafted into  
Your perfect plan

Verse 2

You gently call me into Your presence  
Guiding me by Your Holy Spirit  
Teach me dear Lord to live all of my life  
Through Your eyes

Pre-Chorus

I'm captured by Your holy calling  
Set me apart I know You're drawing  
Me to Yourself  
Lead me Lord I pray

*Chorus*

*Take me mould me  
Use me fill me  
I give my life  
To the Potter's hand  
Call me guide me  
Lead me walk beside me  
I give my life  
To the Potter's hand*

Verse 1

Verse 2

*Chorus*

*Ending*

*To the Potter's hand*

And now Lord, please take my humble words and ideas and infuse them with a fresh message from you. Amen.

Sermon

**Wake up!**

We've all done it: Shouted a mayday call to God when we're in dire straits. *Now's the time Lord for you to come and do something drastic.* Our mind goes blank in an exam. A loved one is sick in hospital. A pandemic grips the earth... *Lord come help! Now would be good...*

It's not clear why a similarly desperate cry opens Isaiah 64, but it surely does! *Rip*

*open the heavens and come Lord! Let the mountains shake like jelly! Let the excitement of your very name make the bad guys boil over in terror. Do something Lord! Now!*

*Like you did in the old days - when the seas parted for your people; come and do it again, now. You did awesome stuff back then; we want the zappy interventionist stuff, and we want it now Lord! There's lots of idols and false gods out there, but you're the real deal! So prove it Lord...*

But somewhere in the prophet's mind there lies his conscience. And this inconvenient conscience reminds him that he and his people have **not** kept their end of any bargain with God. In fact, even the very best they have done has been as dirty as a filthy rag.

*Ah, admits the prophet, we don't call on you like we should! If there are bad guys, well maybe we **are** the bad guys too.* And the section we heard concludes God is a Father to his people. God's people are supposed to be like the clay in a potter's hand for the potter to shape as he chooses.

\* \* \*

So then comes Mark, at this the start of a new church calendar year, the first Sunday of Advent. The context, Mark 13, seems to be a collection of things Jesus had said about the future and the end times, and it's hard to be sure how they might all fit together.

So, when will the end times come? Some want to know. Quoting from first Isaiah, Jesus talks of cosmological collapse and says the Son of Man - Jesus himself - will return in power and in glory and the elect will be gathered by the angels.

Well that sounds pretty cool, so when will that happen then Jesus? So Jesus gives us.... A parable! Ach! Just tell us when Lord... But no, we get the parable... *You see buds on a fig tree and you know summer's coming! Even so, when all these bad things are happening, know that the Son of Man is on his way!*

*But, when Lord, really? Well, when the bad stuff comes close, the end is right at your*

*door. In fact I'll tell you how close the kingdom is: It belongs to you all who are listening to me now. The very heavens, the very earth might fade away, but my word endures forever and you're listening to it now.*

Are we beginning to get it? The world is perpetually in a storm... And so Christ's kingdom is always knocking at our door!

*But **when** will history end, Lord? Really this time, we need to mark it on our calendars. So Jesus spells it out: No one knows! Here's the shocking thing we seldom notice: Jesus says **I don't know!** Only the Father knows, (but please don't ask me to fit that into some theory of the Trinity).*

**You don't know Lord?** So he gives another parable:

*A man goes on holiday and leaves his staff in charge of his house. And the one at the door must keep watch! He's the human security camera. So, **when** does he have to keep watch?*

Between 2am and 5am? Between 10pm and midnight? Hang on a sec, let's consult the burglar's schedule and see when they're planning to break in! So the penny drops. This whole thing is not about locating a mysterious time, a mysterious date - say the 19th June 2021 - when finally everything gets sorted out....

Because we don't know when. Jesus doesn't know when. It's about being Kingdom Ready NOW!

The only when, is NOW.

\* \* \*

Now I have the inestimable privilege of being minister of Hearsall Baptist Church, a Coventry church filled with the most beautiful expressions of love.

And I believe that God speaks through the messages we hear week after week. Two weeks ago we heard a sermon encouraging us to invest in each other. Last week we heard about leadership, and how we are all called to lead ourselves, to be led by the

needy, to be led in love and to be led by Jesus. God speaks to us week by week. These things all fit together.

So, here's my message today. *Hearsall: Wake up!* You are a beautiful church and we are invited to be ready as a bride is ready for her husband on her wedding day. You are invited to live the heavenly life you long to experience, now. Don't put it off until circumstances are just right. **Be** the change you want to see in the world, already.

As an under-shepherd of this beautiful church, I want to suggest four aspects of readiness that I think are key to our continued existence. Yes, I have a particular leadership role, but so do we all. Your perspective matters. I want to invest in you. You invest in me. We all invest in each other. We lead each other in discernment, in the ways of justice, peace and most of all love. So, tell me, what do you think of the following sketch of a vision as a way of waking up to kingdom life in Hearsall?

We are to be a church of contemplating, caring, creating and collaborating. And we are to be that NOW.

**Contemplating.** Well I love contemplative prayer, and some of you may feel drawn to the rich stillness this spiritual discipline brings to the heart. I will perhaps offer sessions on how to pray this way in the coming months. But by contemplating, I also mean we are a church who consider, reflect, pray, study, worship and discern. We contemplate reality. It means, for some of us at least, that we pay attention to what's going on in the world, and we work hard to connect that with our faith. Some of us may want to study theology. It's been said that studying theology is like entering a conversation that's been going on for two thousand years. Is it time you entered that conversation, and helped us hear how faith in God may be credible for the current generation?

**Caring.** Well, we are known as a warm and loving fellowship and please God let that continue. Caring, for me, stresses that our love is to be lived out in action. Maybe this is a little nudge to be a bit more proactive in our caring. Maybe love is inspiring you to take some new caring action. Why not just do it? Call that lonely friend. Offer

to shop for that neighbour. Our caring extends to our organised community ministries, including our ministry to older people; that to toddlers and their parents; and our ministry to visitors from overseas as we help them learn English. Care is not just a warm feeling, but a helpful action. And caring includes very much care for our planet, this beautiful world that we have inherited, which seems to be imperilled by careless human action.

**Creating.** By this, I first of all am talking about the creative arts generally. At Hearsall we have people who like to paint, sing, dance, orchestrate, stage-light, play instruments, story-tell, knit, flower-arrange, song-write and much more. I would love to harness more of this creativity in a stream of projects large and small that explore and express our faith, and also I would like us to foster creativity for its own sake. For to be creative is to reflect the image of God. And our ministry in the local pub, Coexist, is another expression of our creativity. And I would like us also to adopt creative attitudes to problem-solving, fundraising and administration. Don't let new ideas be strangled at birth by practical considerations. If something is inspired by God, well then, let's find a way to do it.

**Collaborating.** The world is full of people of goodwill. Yes, there are some ill-willed people around who can be selfish and very dangerous. But as the old reading Desiderata puts it, *many persons strive for high ideals... everywhere life is full of heroism*. Yes, we can't collaborate with people who oppose our faith or intend evil in the world, but we can work with people of goodwill everywhere. It's far easier to get things done if we work with people who are pulling in broadly the same direction: other churches, people of other faiths, the council, schools, charities and more. To use an old cliché, *No-one's got it together, but together we've got it*.

I believe that by contemplating and by caring, by creating and collaborating, and by weaving all those things together as ever-present aspects of everything we do and every decision we make, we can remain alert, alive, relevant, growing, **awake** as we enter 2021.

I was minister of a Baptist church in a Surrey village and we had the idea of being creative about our harvest festival. What did we do? We talked with the Anglican and Catholic churches in the village. The vicar's wife said, maybe we could run the

Harvest Service at the Autumn farmers' market that took place at a garden centre in the village.

Well we did it. We had a joint worship band. We arranged a suitable tent. We crafted a simple, accessible service. We worked with the Farmers' market, the local council, the garden centre, the Anglican church and the Catholic church to make it happen. It could have been snuffed out as an impractical expensive idea as soon as it was suggested. How much easier just to do what we'd always done, locked away in our separate churches.

But, we ran with it. We contemplated the irrelevance of the church on the day of the Farmers' market. We were banging on about creation behind closed doors whilst punters were buying fresh produce at the market. When we began our Farmers' Market service, we always interviewed a local farmer, sampled their produce, prayed for the agricultural community and encouraged our congregation to go out and do a spot of Sunday shopping. It was about creativity, collaboration and caring for the people who **weren't** in church!

That's probably not a relevant idea in our city. But consider one issue before us right now. Here we are with a congregation who've been in two minds about these online services. Some love them and tune in eagerly every Sunday and share them with friends and relations. In modest numbers we are reaching shift workers, people in faraway countries, local people who wouldn't walk into a church building, and partners of Hearsall regulars. It's a creative, collaborative expression of Christian faith. As we contemplate the modern world, it's a caring way of remembering people who are cut off from Christianity.

But others find these online services rather *soulless* and for them the experience just doesn't work. Communion seems empty when alone in their house and singing just doesn't resonate when they sit at home. Well I can understand that. We must listen to each other.

So, what's the upshot?

Well now, traditionally churches like ours had two services a week. Could we manage two services a week as our forebears always did, only with the second service as an online sound file?

Why not just record the in-person service and share that online? The answer is that the product would be different. A sound-recording of the service at Hearsall would be more ragged, less professional and would not be of the same quality we are producing now. We could call it the Second Service. It might include some of the same elements as the in-person service and might have a slimmed down version of the sermon, but it would be designed for people to access at home. Or in their car. Or on a walk.

Well that's just an example of a way of remaining alert, alive, relevant and awake in 2021.

In summary, at this the time of Advent we await for Christ to come. But it's a very peculiar sort of waiting. We wait, not by sitting on our hands and doing nothing until the heavens crack open and Jesus floats down on a cloud. No, we wait by waking up, by being heaven-ready now. By not putting off the next stage of our life as a church until conditions are more favourable. But by being Christ's fully awake church today,

Let's take a moment to reflect on the message we've heard. The only When is Now...

Christ is coming! Christ is already here! We are kingdom people now. We await the coming of the king. In the midst of this ordinary dusty world, we look up, and see Christ coming to meet us. Let's sing. *I looked up...*

**Song I looked up and I saw my Lord a-coming**

Verse 1

I looked up

And I saw my Lord a-coming,

I looked up

And I saw my Lord a-coming down the road.

*Chorus*

*Alleluia, He is coming,*

*Alleluia, He is here.*

*Alleluia, He is coming.*

*Alleluia, He is here.*

Verse 2

I looked up

And I saw my Lord a-weeping,

I looked up

And I saw my Lord a-weeping for my sins.

*Chorus*

Verse3

I looked up

And I saw my Lord a-dying,

I looked up

And I saw my Lord a-dying on the cross.

*Chorus*

Verse4

I looked up

And I saw my Lord a-rising,

I looked up

And I saw my Lord a-rising from the grave.

*Chorus*

*Alleluia, He is coming,*

*Alleluia, He is here.*

*Alleluia, He is coming.*

*Alleluia, He is here.*

And we share in the words of the grace.

### The Grace

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ;

And the love of God;

And the fellowship of the Holy Spirit

Be with us all, evermore.

Amen

May the peace of the Lord Christ go with you wherever he may send 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.