

27th December 2020

Hearsall at Home

Hello, and welcome to Hearsall at Home.

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.

I am delighted that we have a guest preacher today. We're using a sermon prepared not only for us but for the churches of our region by our own Regional Minister, Revd Neil le Tissier.

For now, let's be still and prepare our hearts for worship.

Order of Service 27th December 2020

Encourage One Another

Call to Worship

Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.

Matthew 11: 28 - 30

Let's begin our service by resting in the calm but powerful presence of our Lord Jesus Christ. We sing together, *Be still...*

Song **Be still for the presence of the Lord**

Be still, for the presence of the Lord, the holy One, is here;
Come bow before him now with reverence and fear:
In him no sin is found we stand on holy ground.
Be still, for the presence of the Lord, the holy One, is here.

Be still, for the glory of the Lord is shining all around;
He burns with holy fire, with splendour he is crowned:
How awesome is the sight our radiant king of light!
Be still, for the glory of the Lord is shining all around.

Be still, for the power of the Lord is moving in this place;
He comes to cleanse and heal, to minister his grace -
No work too hard for Him. In faith receive from him.
Be still, for the power of the Lord is moving in this place.

Prayers

Heavenly Father, we thank you for the joy and care we have experienced over Christmas as we have remembered the gift of your Son. Some of us have been alone or with only a small group, but we thank you that your love, and the love of family and friends, near and far, continues unabated.

We thank you for the support we find in fellow Christians. For sisters and brothers who remember us, pray for us, and encourage us. For the Baptist family of churches in the Heart of England Baptist Association, and especially for Neil our Regional Minister and preacher today. For the family of churches known as Churches Together in Earlsdon and Chapelfields, of which we are a part. For the Hope Coventry network and for all the churches of Coventry, and for churches further afield. For the family of faith scattered around the world, but one in Christ, we give you our thanks in Jesus' name.

And we adore you, the source and sustainer of life, and the one who always rescues us from our sins. Again we ask you to forgive our failings, and encourage us onward toward the goal of our faith. 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.

And now our deacon, Sarah Lewis, would like to share a few festive thoughts with us all...

Festive thoughts: **Hearsall at Home is here to Help!**

Well, if it had been hard to remember what day of the week it was and to get motivated since March, it's really magnified now we are in what has become called "Twixmas". You know, that period between Christmas and the New Year. So Hearsall is here to give you a couple of ideas of things to do (okay I'm involved in them both, so apologies for the self-promotion)

On Wednesday, 30th of December at 7:30 on Zoom, I will be running an end of year quiz. Compered by our own Alan Prichard. This quiz will take you to areas you've never been to or heard of! There will be five rounds of 10 questions with everyone playing their Donald card (trump card!). Now everyone plays as an individual so it doesn't matter if you're at home with the family of many or at home alone. The only thing that is needed is honesty! No prizes, just an enhanced reputation! The quiz will be available in print in the next Messenger so no one is excluded by not being online. However, for those of you who are able to join us on the night on Zoom, the link has been emailed in one of the Hearsall Updates.

My second tip for filling Twixmas is to challenge yourself with the Nativity Trail. Now I've already spoken at length about what this is, and I mentioned that 17 churches are taking part. So to be ever so helpful and also so that you don't have to go online, I have grouped the churches into areas:

On day one, how about doing the Hearsall/Spon end group? This includes our own church, Saint Mary Magdalene's, Bethel and Holyhead Road URC.

On day two, why not find the Allesley Park couple? Saint Christophers and Allesley Park Evangelical?

Day three, a stroll between the Cheylesmore two - West Orchards URC and Saint James's.

Day four, visit the Earlsdon duet of Earlsdon Methodist church and Saint Barbara's.

And finally, see the architectural differences within the city centre loop. I started with Elim Pentecostal, went into town and looked at Warwick Road URC, the Cathedral, the Prayer House in the Old Bluecoat School, Holy Trinity, the Methodist Central Hall and finally, under the subway, to Queens Road Baptist.

What a great way to burn off some of those extra calories we have all enjoyed over Christmas. Remember your aim is to see as many of the characters who appear in the Nativity scene. The organiser would obviously not like it if I gave you any details of these characters but, as an example, we have a lovely picture of one that goes baa!

Thank you Sarah.

We're going to give ourselves a treat now, and listen again to the Sussex Carol as recorded by members of the extended Pritchard family for our carol service.

Carol **The Sussex Carol**

On Christmas night, all Christians sing,
To hear the news the angels bring,
On Christmas night, all Christians sing,
To hear the news the angels bring.
News of great joy, news of great mirth,
News of our merciful King's birth.

Then why should we on earth be so sad,
Since our redeemer made us glad,
Then why should we on earth be sad,
Since our redeemer made us glad.
When from our sin He set us free,
All for to gain our liberty.

When sin departs before his grace,
Then life and health come in its place;
When sin departs before his grace,
Then life and health come in its place;
Angels and all the earth may sing,
All for to see the new born King.

All out of darkness we have light,
Which made the angels sing this night;
All out of darkness we have light,
Which made the angels sing this night:
“Glory to God !” we sing again,
Now and for evermore, Amen.

After that beautiful carol, we turn again to Sarah, who leads us in our prayers of intercession.

Prayers of Intercession

To paraphrase the words of John Lennon – and so that was Christmas, another year over and a new one soon to begin. As Christians, we have celebrated the arrival on earth of your son as a baby and now we turn our thoughts and prayers to 2021; a year full of hopes, fears, excitement and trepidation.

Lord, we continue to ask for your support to help us at this time of a pandemic. We ask for patience as we wait for “our turn” to have the vaccination, and pray for strength to be with those who are administering it – from delivery drivers to nurses, health planners to paramedics.

Be with and comfort those who are struggling with anxiety or depression at a time which is worrying to most people. We think in particular of those living alone. But we extend our thoughts to those who are worried about their job, their finances or just their lives, with the projected rise following the Christmas relaxation of regulations.

Lord, equip us all with the skills to support people; with the ability to listen, to empathise and of how to respond.

We ask for your support and strength and love to be with those who are awaiting surgery and whose pain and suffering has been lengthened by the pandemic's effects on our wonderful National Health Service. Lord, please give them hope and the determination to keep going until their day for their treatment. We pray also for their doctors who are aware of the suffering their patients are experiencing, and frustrated at not being able to use their skills. But we thank you, Lord, for enabling them to learn new skills to help fight the virus and prolong the life of its victims.

We are aware that, for many, Christmas has become a time of tension, when family feuds may smoulder and erupt into violence. Lord, protect people who feel frightened and afraid within, what many used to regard as, the safety of their four walls. Enable them to find strength to reach out and seek help.

We pray for school children and students at college in what is an uncertain academic year. Give them the wisdom to learn well and the understanding to accept changes they are facing. We pray for university students and for their parents, wondering whether they should travel back to their new town or city, or whether to stay at home, wondering what they will face if they do go back and frustrated by seemingly not getting the experience of their predecessors and what they had been promised. We ask for your guidance on the decision-makers to think about the students ahead though mindful of their business needs.

Finally, Lord, we pray for our politicians and key decision-makers to act with wisdom as we draw close to the day we leave the European Union. We are entering into an uncertain time but give us wisdom and understanding, guide us not to reopen divisions between Remainers and Brexiteers, and to maintain a caring relationship with people from other parts of Europe. Help us to see, Lord, that as a responsible nation we are greater than a political decision.

Father, I bring to you these prayers, and our individual prayers in our separate

locations, in the name of your son, our Lord, Jesus Christ.

Amen

Thanks so much Sarah for those prayers. Next we hear our Bible readings from Acts and then from 1 Thessalonians.

Bible Readings

Acts 17: 1 - 9

In Thessalonica

17 When Paul and his companions had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where there was a Jewish synagogue. ²As was his custom, Paul went into the synagogue, and on three Sabbath days he reasoned with them from the Scriptures, ³explaining and proving that the Messiah had to suffer and rise from the dead. 'This Jesus I am proclaiming to you is the Messiah,' he said. ⁴Some of the Jews were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, as did a large number of God-fearing Greeks and quite a few prominent women.

⁵But other Jews were jealous; so they rounded up some bad characters from the market-place, formed a mob and started a riot in the city. They rushed to Jason's house in search of Paul and Silas in order to bring them out to the crowd.^[a] ⁶But when they did not find them, they dragged Jason and some other believers before the city officials, shouting: 'These men who have caused trouble all over the world have now come here, ⁷and Jason has welcomed them into his house. They are all defying Caesar's decrees, saying that there is another king, one called Jesus.' ⁸When they heard this, the crowd and the city officials were thrown into turmoil. ⁹Then they put Jason and the others on bail and let them go.

1 Thessalonians 4:13 - 5:11

Believers who have died

13 Brothers and sisters, we do not want you to be uninformed about those who sleep in death, so that you do not grieve like the rest of mankind, who have no hope.

14 For we believe that Jesus died and rose again, and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him. **15** According to the Lord's word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. **16** For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. **17** After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord for ever. **18** Therefore encourage one another with these words.

The day of the Lord

5 Now, brothers and sisters, about times and dates we do not need to write to you, **2** for you know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. **3** While people are saying, 'Peace and safety', destruction will come on them suddenly, as labour pains on a pregnant woman, and they will not escape. **4** But you, brothers and sisters, are not in darkness so that this day should surprise you like a thief. **5** You are all children of the light and children of the day. We do not belong to the night or to the darkness. **6** So then, let us not be like others, who are asleep, but let us be awake and sober. **7** For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk, get drunk at night. **8** But since we belong to the day, let us be sober, putting on faith and love as a breastplate, and the hope of salvation as a helmet. **9** For God did not appoint us to suffer wrath but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ. **10** He died for us so that, whether we are awake or asleep, we may live together with him. **11** Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing.

Paul's letter to the Thessalonians sees daily human life from the perspective of eternity. *Once in Royal David's City* also reaches into the realm of forever in its concluding thoughts. We sing together now...

Carol Once in Royal David's City

Once in Royal David's city
Stood a lowly cattle shed.
Where a mother laid her baby
In a manger for His bed.
Mary was that mother mild,
Jesus Christ that little child.

He came down to earth from Heaven,
Who is God and Lord of all.
And his shelter was a stable,
And his cradle was a stall.
With the poor and mean and lowly,
Lived on earth our Saviour Holy.

And through all his wondrous childhood
He would honour and obey,
Love, and watch the lowly maiden,
In whose gentle arms he lay;
Christian children all must be
Mild, obedient, good as he.

For he is our childhood's pattern,
Day by day like us he grew,
He was little, weak and helpless,
Tears and smiles like us he knew;
And he feeleth for our sadness,
And he shareth in our gladness.

And our eyes at last shall see Him,
Through His own redeeming love,
For that child so dear and gentle

Is our Lord in Heaven above;
And He leads His children on,
To the place where He is gone.

Not in that poor, lowly stable,
With the oxen standing by,
We shall see Him; but in Heaven,
Set at God's right hand on high;
When, like stars, His children crowned
All in white, shall wait around.

I am delighted that our Regional Minister Neil Le Tissier has shared a sermon for the churches of our area to use at this time. May God speak to us all through Neil's reflections. Now Neil's sermon is also available as a video link on the front page of our website. If you want to switch to video now, you could leave this audio file playing silently and then re-join it after Neil's fifteen minute message, so as to conclude our service together.

Sermon

HEBA Churches, November 2020 (Neil Le Tissier)

Encourage One Another

1 Thessalonians 4:13-5:11

Hello everyone.

For those who don't know me, I am one of the HEBA Regional Ministers, and in particular I support the Churches and Ministers in Birmingham South, Solihull, Coventry, and Warwickshire.

- I expect this picture is familiar to you, but perhaps I can remind you of the story that lies behind it.

On the left is Derek Redmond, a British medal-winning athlete. He set a new British record in 1985, and again in 1987, for the 400 metres. He was a member of the 400-metre relay team that won gold in the 1986 European Championships, and gold again at the World Championships in 1991.

But it was at the 1992 Olympics in Barcelona, that he became a household name. He was in great form, setting the fastest time in the first round, and then winning his quarter-final. In the semi-final he started well but, in the back straight, about 250 metres from the finish, his hamstring tore. He sank to the ground in agony, and the stretcher-bearers were soon running to his aid. But Derek wanted to finish the race, so he got slowly and painfully to his feet and began hobbling along the track. The sheer agony of the effort was written all over his face, and it was at this point that a man climbed down from the crowd and drew alongside him to give him support. It was Derek's father – Jim – and together they completed the course and crossed the line. The crowd was on its feet, cheering them all the way, and rewarding Derek with the loudest ovation any winner could ever ask for.

Now if you were to ask me who won that race, I would have to confess I haven't a clue. But I do know who came last, because that image of encouragement and perseverance is seared into my memory. And what a wonderful picture it is!

- There are times in life when all of us need some encouragement. To encourage someone means to build courage in them, and we can do that by walking with them through their time of despair, inspiring them with words of hope, and giving them confidence to keep going.
- In our Bible reading, the Apostle Paul is writing a letter to the Church in Thessalonica, exhorting them to “encourage one other and build each other up.” Why is that? What were their particular circumstances?

Well, Acts ch.17 & vv.1-9 describe how Paul and Silas had visited Thessalonica on Paul's third missionary journey. They had gone first to the Synagogue,

where they preached the good news of Jesus Christ, and many Jews and God-fearing Greeks came to faith. But because of jealousy, they then suffered persecution at the hands of the other Jews. Paul and Silas were forced to leave in a hurry, and they were concerned that these new converts might become weary of this trial and abandon their faith. So, this letter was sent to encourage them and build them up, and in turn to prompt them to encourage one another.

To do so, Paul reminds them of the hope that lies ahead. Chapter 4 verses 13-17 is all about the coming again of the Lord, and in particular a reminder that even if they die before seeing Christ's triumphant and glorious return, they will be raised at the trumpet sound and be with the Lord forever. What a rallying cry! And he ends these verses with this exhortation in v.18: "Therefore encourage each other with these words."

Then in ch.15 vv.1-10, which is really the second half of the previous passage, Paul goes on to explain that the timing of this event was not known but would come upon them like a thief in the night. And whilst many, who do not believe, will be taken by surprise by that "thief", the Church will not. Not if they remain alert and self-controlled, living each day as if it is The Day.

So Paul is encouraging them to keep focussed on the hope that they have in their salvation, made possible through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, so that their suffering will pale into insignificance in comparison, and so that they will not give up.

This is a common theme of Paul's letters, and elsewhere he likens the Christian journey to running a race. To the Corinthian Church he writes: "Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize. Run in such a way as to get the prize." (1 Co 9:24) To the Galatian Church he writes: "You were running a good race. Who cut in on you and kept you from obeying the truth?" (Gal 5:7) And to Timothy he wrote: "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness." (2 Tim 4:7-8) And this race analogy may have prompted the author of the letter to the Hebrews (who were also Jewish converts

experiencing persecution) to write: “Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.” (Heb 12:1-3)

What a wonderful image this is, and for the letters’ recipients, who were well acquainted with the Greek Games, how helpful this must have been in keeping them focussed and persevering. A source of great encouragement and hope!

- And this analogy of the Christian’s life as a marathon to be completed, often gruelling and sometimes painful, is still so relevant and powerful today.

Indeed, whenever I read these words, my mind’s eye is filled with an image of a great stadium, packed with cheering crowds, encouraging the athletes to run their best, finish the race and receive their reward. And then I’m brought back to this image of a fallen and injured Derek Redmond. And as I gaze on this picture of his father drawing alongside him, I am reminded that God took on flesh and came down in Jesus to live amongst us, to show us the way, to help us overcome the obstacles, to give us a hope, and to help us to finish well.

In fact, when I look at it, even the way Jim Redmond is supporting his son in this picture, reminds me of Jesus’ invitation in Matthew’s Gospel: “Come to me, all who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you ... for my yoke is easy and my burden is light.” (Mt 11:28-30) Yes that’s it – Derek and his father Jim look like they’re yoked together, don’t they?

Of course, Jesus would have been familiar with making comfortable wooden yokes that allowed a plough to be pulled and a burden to be carried. And he is offering to be yoked together with believers, to enable them to complete the tasks that they’ve been given and carry the burdens that weigh them down.

How does this happen? Well I think he brings people alongside us who will walk with us, work with us, and ease our burden.

One of the things I love so much about Scripture is how these images resonate through the ages, to still bring relevant and powerful encouragement to us today.

[pause]

- So how do we earth these big promises in our current situations and circumstances?

Well, as I write and record this talk, we find ourselves deeply entrenched in the pandemic known as Covid-19. We've lived with its consequences for nearly 8 months already, and now we're slipping steadily into a second wave of infections and possibly facing another national lockdown. Many have lost loved ones, are suffering with symptoms, or struggling with the longer-term consequences of infection know as Long-Covid. Many have lost jobs, income, businesses, and are struggling to survive on meagre savings, benefits and grants. Many feel lost, lonely, and isolated, as a result of shielding, quarantine, and self-isolation. Many are suffering with poor mental health, depression, and anxiety. And for those of us who are Followers of Christ, many of our church buildings are closed or only partially-open, and the services groups and activities that are our usual source of fellowship, teaching and worship, are happening online or, in many cases, not at all.

Life is hard, faith is hard, but Jesus' invitation is still resounding loud and clear – “Come to me, and I will give you rest. I will help you up, and walk with you, and support and strengthen you. Lean on me and together we will overcome these trials, and finish the race together. For I have already won the victory for you, and if you put your trust in me, you will receive your eternal reward.”

- So, these words of Paul to the Thessalonians, and now to us, are given **firstly** for our encouragement and faith-building. Let us hear them, receive their truth, and respond in faith. Perhaps you have never actually responded to Christ's gift

of forgiveness, and eternal life with him? His death on the cross, and his rising again, has saved you from the consequences of sin, and he is offering you this salvation and reward as a gift. All you need to do is believe it and accept it, and you can know the assurance of eternal life in his glorious kingdom. Can I encourage you to do that today? To know that confidence in your future.

And **secondly**, these words are given to inspire us to be those who would step out from the crowd and draw alongside those who are struggling and hurting. Let us be the hands, feet, and mouthpiece of Christ, bringing encouragement to others, helping them to get up, to keep going, and to finish the race.

For it is Christ who is the author and perfecter of our faith, and it is he who awaits us at the finish with the loudest cheers and trumpets sounding, and a celebration banquet the like of which we cannot even imagine.

Let us pray...

Lord we acknowledge again today, that life is tough. We face many difficulties and many unknowns, and we sometimes, often, feel beaten. As did the Psalmist, we bring our fears, anxieties, depression, and anger, and lay them at your feet. We acknowledge that we need you and cannot continue without your help and support.

Lord, we are so grateful that you came down to live amongst us – Immanuel – God with us. You understand our trials, and sent your Holy Spirit to be with us always, bringing us comfort, guidance and power to overcome. Thank you for your ultimate and costly sacrifice on the cross that made possible our redemption and secured for us a glorious eternity with God. Help us to keep our eyes focussed on you, to draw encouragement from your example, and to keep going to the end.

Lord, show us how we can be your hands, feet, and mouthpiece to a hurting world. Help us to be an encouragement to those we come alongside, and to build them up in faith, vision and peace.

For we ask it all in the name of Jesus Christ and for the sake of the Kingdom of God. Amen.

If you've been touched during Neil's ministry, do remember that I am available to listen to you, pray for you and talk through any issues that may have arisen. Maybe for the first time you've opened your heart to the Lord Jesus Christ. If so, I'd love to hear about that, and to support you in your Christian life.

Now we sing one of my favourite carols: *It came upon the midnight clear*.

Carol (BPW 168) It Came upon the Midnight Clear

It came upon the midnight clear,
That glorious song of old,
From angels bending near the earth
To touch their harps of gold:
'Peace on the earth, good will to men,
From heaven's all gracious King;'
The world in solemn stillness lay
To hear the angels sing.

Still through the cloven skies they come,
With peaceful wings unfurled,
And still their heavenly music floats
O'er all the weary world:
Above its sad and lowly plains
They bend on hovering wing,
And ever o'er its Babel sounds
The blessed angels sing.

Yet with the woes of sin and strife
The world has suffered long,
Beneath the angel-strain have rolled
Two thousand years of wrong;
And man, at war with man, hears not
The love-song which they bring:

O hush the noise, you men of strife,
And hear the angels sing.

And still the days are hastening on,
By prophet once foretold,
When with the ever-circling years
Comes round the age of gold;
When peace shall over all the earth
Its ancient splendours fling,
And the whole world send back the song
Which now the angels sing.

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

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.