

26th April 2020

Hearsall at Home

Hello, and welcome to Hearsall at Home.

We hope that you listen to this service either on a Sunday morning, or at another time, and you will worship, sing, pray and reflect on the scriptures along with all of us.

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

So sit down, relax and prepare yourself to worship God with us.

Order of Service 26 4 2020

The Choice

Call to Worship

Deuteronomy 30: 19 - 20

This day I call the heavens and the earth as witnesses against you that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Now choose life, so that you and your children may live and that you may love the Lord your God, listen to his voice, and hold fast to him. For the Lord is your life, and he will give you many years in the land he swore to give to your fathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

Song (WT 82)

Far and near hear the call
Worship him, Lord of all
Families of nations come
Celebrate what God has done

Deep and wide is the love
Heaven sent from above
God's own Son for sinners died
Rose again, he is alive

*Say it loud, say it strong
Tell the world what God has done
Say it loud, praise his name
Let the earth rejoice
For the Lord reigns.*

At his name let praise begin
Oceans roar, nature sing
For he comes to judge the earth
In righteousness and in his truth

Prayers

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 this day our daily bread
and forgive us our sins

as we forgive those who sin against us.
And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil
For the kingdom, the power and the glory are yours.
Now and forever. Amen.

Prayer by Val

Hello God, it's me again!

The procrastinating, argumentative, whining and curious member of your flock.

Thank you for every morning I wake up healthy.
Thank you for not deserting me, when I deserted you.
Thank you for being here with us through these turbulent times.
Thank you for my Hearsall family who fill my heart with joy and enrich my life.

Please God, help the world to emerge from these bleak times with renewed energy
and kinder hearts.
With a greater love for mankind, for all types of animals and for this wonderful planet
Earth.

I hope you are o.k. God, I love you.

A prayer about choices

Lord, thank you for the gift of free choice, though I often wonder that you trusted us
with it. To be honest, we frequently choose what's easiest, or most convenient for
ourselves alone. Forgive us for our selfish thoughts, words and actions and help us
to choose what seems good to you and what shows respect for all you have made. If
you set before us a choice between life and death, between blessings and curses,
help us to choose blessing and life for everyone. Amen.

Behind Closed Doors

The Peirce family

Hello everyone.

I hope you are all keeping safe and well. Welcome to the Peirce family edition of
Behind Closed Doors. We're missing you all and church very much- the
togetherness, the time for reflection, the sense of community and belonging and also
timing our arrival on a Sunday so we're just that little bit late. You know, not too late
to have missed much, but late enough for it to be embarrassing. I'm sure you'll be
glad to know that this is still the case with these recordings – we're probably not

even listening now. Rufus is missing the biscuits too. We'll start with the most important issue, what you're all wondering about. My hair. I know it's the envy of many in the church community, especially the follicly challenged men. I haven't shaved it. It's just really quite long and thick, like permanently wearing a Russian hat. So, I've decided to wear a headband. Not a sissy headband. The type a really good footballer would wear.

So what's life like for us? Well, it's very full and very tiring but we feel so grateful to be together. I'm working from home and go into school once a week to supervise the children of key workers. It's a bizarre experience- a cavernous school building with between 6 and 10 students, all socially distanced across a hall or a classroom. Two members of staff. The students are remarkable and resilient, working hard on the remote learning tasks their teachers have set. The rest of the week I grapple with my job from home. Setting and marking work online. Writing really interesting policies.

Persevering through zoom meetings, which for me involves biding my time before stepping in with an incisive, succinct point that makes everyone nod. With Rufus and Laurie, working from home is certainly interesting and, gladly, interrupted. I read someone online claim that working from home from with kids necessitates a rewrite of Dolly Parton's working 9 to 5. It's more like: 'working 9 to 9.12, then 9.55 to 10.23' and so on. Still, it's a way to make a living and during these difficult times I am extremely thankful for that.

Maria has turned into some kind of keep-fit obsessive. She does online yoga classes it seems almost constantly, Joe Wicks workouts, online ballet, online Bollywood. She's now like a whippet. In all seriousness, I know she is also incredibly grateful for the position we are in as a family and for the time we are getting to spend with Rufus and Laurie. She's attempting to start her dance teaching online, but is being hampered by copyright issues over music. Very frustrating!

Rufus is having a great time and has fallen into a new routine. PE with Joe Wicks on YouTube, an online craft session, extended 'coffee time' which involves biscuits and or chocolate, and in the afternoon he completes his nursery work. He has literacy and numeracy work. He's learnt about the life cycle of a chicken, made his own play dough, recorded his own ukulele numbers and made a big den in the garden. All of this gets photographed or videoed and sent to his teacher, Miss Burke. She responds to everything, and with such encouragement and enthusiasm. How she does this for 80 children I will never know! Rufus also has his amazing imagination to keep him occupied and we are whizzed away each day to worlds of pirates, Mary Poppins and bear nurseries.

Laurie continues with what he does best- bowling around the house, drinking milk, eating anything he can and sorting out various toys. Both he and Rufus have loved

being outside in this great weather and Laurie, in particular, has developed a love of mud, dirt and anything else he can get covered in.

So, in short, we are fine and making the best of the situation. As I've said, we're very grateful and feel so thankful. At the same time, we also feel so much for those in our world who are not so fortunate. I hope that this experience, once it is all over, will result in greater kindness and equality in our society. When times are tough, as they are now, we rely on those we have, as a whole, overlooked for so long. Nurses, cleaners, carers, shop workers.

Maria and I have rekindled our love of Tolkien and have re-watched all of Lord of the Rings in the last few weeks. On Mount Doom, when Frodo can go no further with the ring, Sam says to him, 'I can't carry it for you, but I can carry you.' Sam's the hero really and so are all of those carrying us at the moment.

Song

Our God is a great big God
Our God is a great big God
Our God is a great big God
And He holds us in His hands

He's higher than a skyscraper
He's deeper than a submarine
He's wider than the universe
And beyond my wildest dreams
He's known me and He's loved me
Since before the world began
How wonderful to be a part of
God's amazing plan

Offering

Lord, receive all the gifts we offer: gifts of friendship offered over the phone and the internet; gifts of service we may offer to those who are vulnerable; gifts of prayer we may make for others; gifts of money we give through our bank accounts or by saving our cash. E pray that all these gifts may be used to share your love in our world today. Amen.

Hymn (BPW 603)

What a friend we have in Jesus,
all our sins and griefs to bear!
What a privilege to carry
everything to God in prayer!
O what peace we often forfeit,
O what needless pain we bear,

all because we do not carry
everything to God in prayer!

Have we trials and temptations?
Is there trouble anywhere?
We should never be discouraged:
take it to the Lord in prayer!
Can we find a friend so faithful,
who will all our sorrows share?
Jesus knows our every weakness,
take it to the Lord in prayer.

Are we weak and heavy-laden,
cumbered with a load of care?
Jesus only is our refuge:
take it to the Lord in prayer!
Do your friends despise, forsake you?
Take it to the Lord in prayer!
In his arms he'll take and shield you;
you will find a solace there.

Intercessions

Written by Sandra Noel and read by Denise Ree.

Father God we come to you now, realizing that we are part of your world-wide family. At this time of world trauma it is obvious that we are all equal no matter what our nationality, our religion, or our status. But you are a God of love and you love each one of us—you suffer with us and also project your love in the way we care for each other.

And so Father we pray for our world. We pray for those who are mourning the loss of loved ones, some who were not able to be with them during their last hours. Give them your peace Lord and memories of good times to console them.

Father we pray for all our N.H.S. Staff working tirelessly to alleviate pain and distress of so many. We hold before you especially those who have to hold the hands of those who are dying, giving comforting words which loved ones are unable to give.

We pray for scientists struggling to develop a vaccine to destroy the CV19 virus. Give them the patience, knowledge and scientific cooperation to overcome this deadly disease so that this will not happen again in the future.

We pray for those in Care Homes where the fear and tension is great. We bring to you our friend Christine Adamson and those living with her in The Spinney Care

Home. We ask your protection on them all as they and their families and friends worry about the days ahead.

Father we thank you too for good neighbours helping those who are house bound at present. We pray that the friendships made at this time will continue once this crisis is over. As we think of the future Lord we know there are many who fear that they will lose their jobs. We hold them before you and pray that the government strategies to help overcome this problem will help many at this difficult time.

We pray for our church , for David and the deacons as they make time to prepare these services. Give our congregation the confidence and ability to keep in contact with each other and hold each other in prayer. We bring to you those who normally use our buildings—our young people and also other groups especially The Alzheimer's Group who need contact with each other to help them survive each day.

We pray for Ray Ball in hospital for a bowel operation and for Kay who is worried about him and not allowed to visit. Bring healing and comfort to them both.

We bring to you all our Lunch Club folk , missing the social contact they have each Wednesday. Especially we pray for Ruth Pritchard preparing to move into Victoria Gardens Care Home in the near future. Be with her and her family as they take this big step. May it bring Ruth companionship and security in the days ahead.

Now we will have a time of quiet as we bring to God those we know individually who need our special prayers.

Father hear our prayers for we ask them in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ
AMEN

Bible readings

Acts 2: 14 & 36 - 41

Then Peter stood up with the Eleven, raised his voice and addressed the crowd: 'Fellow Jews and all of you who live in Jerusalem, let me explain this to you; listen carefully to what I say. Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Messiah.'

37 When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, 'Brothers, what shall we do?'

38 Peter replied, 'Repent and be baptised, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.
39 The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off – for all whom the Lord our God will call.'

40 With many other words he warned them; and he pleaded with them, 'Save yourselves from this corrupt generation.' 41 Those who accepted his message were baptised, and about three thousand were added to their number that day.

Luke 24: 13 - 35

13 Now that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem. 14 They were talking with each other about everything that had happened. 15 As they talked and discussed these things with each other, Jesus himself came up and walked along with them; 16 but they were kept from recognising him.

17 He asked them, 'What are you discussing together as you walk along?'

They stood still, their faces downcast. 18 One of them, named Cleopas, asked him, 'Are you the only one visiting Jerusalem who does not know the things that have happened there in these days?'

19 'What things?' he asked.

'About Jesus of Nazareth,' they replied. 'He was a prophet, powerful in word and deed before God and all the people. 20 The chief priests and our rulers handed him over to be sentenced to death, and they crucified him; 21 but we had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel. And what is more, it is the third day since all this took place. 22 In addition, some of our women amazed us. They went to the tomb early this morning 23 but didn't find his body. They came and told us that they had seen a vision of angels, who said he was alive. 24 Then some of our companions went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said, but they did not see Jesus.'

25 He said to them, 'How foolish you are, and how slow to believe all that the prophets have spoken! 26 Did not the Messiah have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?' 27 And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself.

28 As they approached the village to which they were going, Jesus continued on as if he were going further. 29 But they urged him strongly, 'Stay with us, for it is nearly evening; the day is almost over.' So he went in to stay with them.

30 When he was at the table with them, he took bread, gave thanks, broke it and began to give it to them. 31 Then their eyes were opened and they recognised him, and he disappeared from their sight. 32 They asked each other, 'Were not our hearts

burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?’

33 They got up and returned at once to Jerusalem. There they found the Eleven and those with them, assembled together 34 and saying, ‘It is true! The Lord has risen and has appeared to Simon.’ 35 Then the two told what had happened on the way, and how Jesus was recognised by them when he broke the bread.

Song (BPW 5)

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 splendor 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

Sermon

The Choice

Cleopas and his friend look back over their recent experience of the stranger on the road. They had only recognised him when he broke the bread at their destination, but looking back they remembered how their hearts had been warmed by the words of this wandering pilgrim.

5,000 people are baptised in Jerusalem on Pentecost Day. They had been swept along with the political consensus that the upstart northern preacher must be killed. Challenged by Peter’s sermon, and looking back, they realise he was the long-awaited Messiah - and they had gone along with his crucifixion.

Sometimes we don’t recognise that something good - someone good - is with us in a very dark time, and we only fully know this in retrospect. When we look back on this time of crisis, what will we recognise that was good? Will we even say that God was with us?... even that God was especially close to us, offering wonderful gifts at this strange time?

Deuteronomy chapter 30 famously includes this stark choice: See, I set before you today life and prosperity, death and destruction. Does God set life and death before the world through this pandemic? Will we recognise him? Will we choose life?

Local churches like ours have been offering vital support to one another, though some in our city are tragically more isolated through no fault of their own. God stands in our city and says, Look: the local church really matters! Not the building, but the people, the community! When life gets tough, we need to know we are a part of something bigger than ourselves. We need to be already in relationships, so that when we require back-up, we've got it through people we trust and love.

Of course it's far from just churches who create community life. Temples, mosques and other religious groups also offer social cohesion. And it's not only religious groups: sports clubs, schools, dancing groups, universities, theatres, painting guilds, all kinds of groups help build up the robust community life which is vital to surviving a pandemic. See I have set before you community and individuality. Therefore choose community.

Over recent years the world has become increasingly aware of the looming environmental catastrophe, one which could even wipe out humanity altogether. In this crisis, what do we find? Cleaner air to take into our lungs; quiet streets to stroll in; coral reefs regenerating; rare leatherback turtles nesting in much larger numbers on beaches in Thailand and Florida; stars more brightly visible at night; wildlife expanding its range... It appears this planet may still have the capacity to heal itself and renew itself.

See I set before you a choice: suffocating pollution with catastrophic climate change; and a fresh, beautiful planet to share with all creation. Therefore choose a fresh and beautiful planet.

It's very moving to applaud our NHS staff every Thursday evening. Who could fail to respect and support health care workers who lay their lives on the line for those who are sick? And we know that many have died in the course of their work.

Now I for one have long been puzzled by our society's apparent reluctance to fund the NHS adequately. We demand a world-class health service, but want someone else to pay for it.

This is a weakness in our democratic system. We are too often encouraged to vote for what will make us as individuals better off. But surely any religious person, any moral person, any loving person, would want to cast their vote for what makes society generally healthier.

There are some signs of political parties collaborating across the tedious party lines. Yes, we want a great NHS. Yes we want better conditions for care workers. And that must be paid for in a variety of ways: by adjusting various business taxes; and by ensuring multinationals pay a fair share of local taxes in nations where they make so much profit. By asking those with the broadest financial shoulders to bear the greatest financial burden.

But it must also be about the taxes I pay. I want to pay more tax, along with everyone else who has the privilege of a secure and reasonable income, so that everyone can benefit from great health and social care. And the current crisis shows me that I want this now, more than ever. And I want this attitude to endure.

Who could not be moved by Captain Tom's fundraising exploits? Of course the money will make a real difference. But in the long term, do we really want a funding model for the NHS that depends on elderly fundraisers doing laps of their garden?

See I set before you a system built on personal gain; and one that prizes justice for all. Therefore choose justice for all.

One image that has stayed with me is that of the statue of Christ the Redeemer in Rio de Janeiro illuminated to look like a front line doctor. There are many great vibes that come from this image. Christ is the Great Physician who heals all our sicknesses. Our doctors and nurses are Christ-like, risking, and even giving, their lives for others. Two poignant thoughts.

It's said that it was with the death of Princess Diana that the British began to use shrines again, laying flowers at the scenes of accidents, publicly mourning the death of notable individuals. When I look at our culture now, I see something similar to these shrines: lots of little displays of support for the NHS, and rightly so. NHS logos in people's living room windows; heart warming NHS stories shared on social media; and it's good and right to do that.

But when I look at that image of Christ the Redeemer as a health worker, it does provoke some deeper reflecting in me. If I were seriously ill with Covid-19, would I want a doctor or a priest? While there was still hope for my body, I'd want a doctor to be given priority access to me, wouldn't you? At least I'd want the doctor's life-saving work not to be interrupted by a priest. The doctor would take precedence in a functional sense.

But woe to me if I forget what the priest represents - the presence of God in the midst of my suffering with a hope of everlasting life, and there could well come a moment when the priest, and not the doctor, would take precedence.

A few moments ago I said this: Our doctors and nurses are Christ-like, risking, and even giving their lives for others. I chose my words carefully. They are Christ-like. Let's not give them the added burden of expecting them to be Christ. We need Christ himself.

Far from absent in this storm of sickness, Christ is present among us. We may not recognise him, as Cleopas and his friend did not recognise the stranger on the road. We may even have cooperated with social forces that rejected him and snuffed out all talk of spirituality as outdated superstition.

No matter. Christ himself is with us. Some may be recognising him and turning to prayer. Some may be sensing that there's more to life than meets the eye.

Some may feel a disconnect between all the activity of the world and the quiet, inner aching within. Some may feel pain in being separated from loved ones they normally see quite regularly; and long to hold them. Some may have lost a life partner to covid-19 and be left home alone, unable to be comforted.

This is a time to open our eyes and recognise Christ at work in the midst of this pandemic. This pandemic IS a call to prayer. It IS a call to worship. A call to wait on God. A call to see that a person's life does not consist in the abundance of their possessions. A call to recognise the humanity of people of all philosophies and faiths. A call to see that we have sisters and brothers in North Korea and China; in India and Pakistan; in Ukraine and Spain; in Canada and Mexico; in Venezuela and Chile... United in the threat of sickness, let us be united in a heart of love, of spiritual unity, of prayer.

See I set before you a choice: warring nations and tribes; or one family of humanity. Therefore, choose the one family.

Let us recognise the humanity of care workers, fruit pickers, lorry drivers, shelf stackers and numerous others who are keeping us alive in this really weird time. Let us recognise the humanity of abuse victims, refugees, homeless people and those with mental health issues, who feel the pressure of loneliness is too much to bear. And let us recognise the dignity of the entire created order, an intricate and complex web of life on which our very existence depends.

See I have set before you a choice: seeing love and goodness in all people; or separating yourselves into the good and the bad, Therefore choose love and goodness.

See I have set before you a choice: taking your place as loving stewards of all I have made on this planet; or destroying it with reckless greed. Therefore choose love!

Choose life! Choose inter-dependency. Choose shared prosperity. Choose true community. Choose green power sources. Choose sustainable lifestyles. Choose quiet prayer and meditation. Choose an appreciation of this beautiful world. Choose good local food. Choose collaboration.

Choose life... Choose life... Choose life!

Hymn (BPW 308)

God is our strength and refuge,
our present help in trouble
and we therefore will not fear,
though the earth should change!
Though mountains shake and tremble,
though swirling floods are raging,
God the Lord of hosts is with us evermore!

There is a flowing river,
within God's holy city;
God is in the midst of her -
she shall not be moved!
God's help is swiftly given,
thrones vanish at his presence -
God the Lord of hosts is with us evermore!

Come, see the works of our maker,
learn of his deeds all-powerful;
wars will cease across the world
when he shatters the spear!
Be still and know your creator,
uplift him in the nations -
God the Lord of hosts is with us evermore!

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
now and always. 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.