

Order of Service 25th July 2021

Be Prayerful

Welcome

Hello and welcome to Hearsall at Home for 25th July 2021. Today's service is called 'Be Prayerful'. Let's wait for a moment in prayer as we prepare our hearts for worship.

Call to Worship

The gospels often tell us that Jesus would withdraw to lonely places to pray. So we draw aside from the cares of our life and sing a song of praise to the God who is forever faithful and true.

Song Give Thanks to the Lord our God and King (Forever)

Way-o Way-o, Way-o Way-o, Way-o Way-o,
Way-o Way-o, Way-o Way-o, Way-o Way-o...

Verse 1

Give thanks to the Lord,
Our God and King,
His love endures forever.
For He is good; He is above all things,
His love endures forever.
Sing praise, sing praise.

Verse 2

With a mighty hand
And an outstretched arm,
His love endures forever.
For the life that's been reborn,
His love endures forever.
Sing praise, sing praise,
Sing praise, sing praise.

Chorus

*Forever God is faithful,
Forever God is strong,
Forever God is with us,
Forever.*

Verse 3

From the rising to the setting sun,
His love endures forever,
And by the grace of God
We carry on,
His love endures forever.
Sing praise, sing praise,
Sing praise, sing praise.

Chorus x2

Way-o Way-o, Way-o Way-o, Way-o Way-o,
Way-o Way-o, Way-o Way-o, Way-o Way-o.

Sing praise, sing praise,
Sing praise, sing praise.

Prayers of Praise

Carmelite monk, Brother Lawrence, famously said, 'The time of business does not with me differ from the time of prayer; and in the noise and clutter of my kitchen, while several persons are at the same time calling for different things, I possess God as great tranquillity as if I were upon my knees at the Blessed Sacrament'. And so we pray together.

Lord God, we give you thanks for the lives we lead.

For all its everyday joys we bless your name.

For caring for a garden, walking a dog, taking a shower, cooking a meal, sleeping in a comfortable bed, sharing a friendly chat and for every lovely little part of our lives, we bless your name.

Help us also to praise you in our hearts and to know your peace even when times

are challenging.

When people make unreasonable demands or give unfair criticism; when we are pushed for time or when we grow listless or bored; when circumstances frustrate our plans; when we are unwell... In all these times help us to praise you, not for our difficulties, but in them.

And we praise you for Jesus who died to make us whole, and for your Holy Spirit who pours love into our hearts.

Forgive us our sins, and help us to live our lives ever more closely aligned with your kingdom of love and as a living sacrifice or praise. Amen.

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.

Let's enjoy the song, *Seek ye first the Kingdom of God.*

Hymn (BPW 357) **Seek ye first the Kingdom of God**

Seek ye first the Kingdom of God,
and His righteousness,
and all these things shall be added unto you;
allelu – alleluia!

Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia, allelu – alleluia!

Man shall not live by bread alone,
but by every word
that proceeds from the mouth of God;
allelu – alleluia!

Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia, allelu – alleluia!

Ask and it shall be given unto you;
seek and ye shall find;
knock and the door shall be opened unto you;
allelu – alleluia!

Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia, allelu – alleluia!

Trust in the Lord with all thine heart,
he shall direct thy path,
in all thy ways acknowledge him;
allelu – alleluia!

Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia, allelu – alleluia!

Praise to the Father, praise to the Son,
praise to the Spirit too,
and to the Godhead, three in one;
allelu – alleluia!

Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia, allelu – alleluia!

Our Saints Alive feature this week comes from Jenny Baxi.

Saints Alive!

Hello, I'm Jennifer Baxi. I've been coming to Hearsall for about four years but my family have had links here for a long time. My dad, Frederick Henry Buxton, was Hearsall's first organist. He enjoyed helping to choose the organ and later set up the choir. As a family, we attended Queen's Road Baptist where Dad was previously organist. His father was a Methodist minister so my parents tried the Central Hall before settling at Queens Road. My sister and I were both dedicated at Queen's Road, as were my children and theirs. I was brought up in a loving, Christian home which I always feel was a firm foundation for my faith. In my youth, I went to Sunday school in the afternoon which is when my love for Jesus grew. When I was thirteen, I

gave my life to Jesus and was baptised. After training to become a teacher, I met and married an Indian Hindu. Mixed marriage was very, very rare in those days; even rarer was a white woman in a sari in India. Bharat came to know and love Jesus. This was a comfort to our family, as he sadly suddenly passed away when our children were three, four, fourteen and fifteen years old. Life has been difficult but rewarding. I have four children, and six grandchildren of all nationalities, I had a wonderful teaching career, Jesus has given me strength through struggles and his love and kindness through others. I have always enjoyed being part of church fellowship, going to flower club, bells, choir, craft. I organise readers, help serve lunch at Norton House and helped my daughter with Soulful, her youth choir. All four of my children went to Girls' Brigade and Boy's Brigade where they made good Christian friends. It is important for me that in raising my family, God is central. After a lifetime at Queens Road I felt led to attend Hearsall. There is peace here that helps me worship. The building holds memories, the congregation show fellowship and David is a great Christian example. During covid restrictions, I have been blessed by people bringing me the service and church magazine. I would especially like to thank Annie and Nick for your time and effort. I look forward to seeing you each week and listening to the service. My sister, Sylvia, helps me log in by phone. It takes me a while - another challenge that God's provided me with help to achieve. I pray that you and your families are well and that you see all the blessings God sends you. Enjoy his sunshine and stay safe. Missing seeing you, with much love, Jenny.

David: Jenny, thank you so much for sharing with us. It was so lovely to hear your story. I think you've chosen a hymn for us, which one have you picked?

Jenny: Great is Thy Faithfulness

David: And why is that so special to you?

Jenny: My dad played it beautifully, it's a family favourite, as God has always been faithful, and the last verse has special meaning:

'Pardon for sin and a peace everlasting,
Your loving presence to cheer and to guide,
Strength for today and bright hope for tomorrow;
These are the blessings Your love will provide.

Great is Thy faithfulness, great is Thy faithfulness,
Morning by morning new blessings, I see.
All I have needed Your hand has provided.
Great is Thy faithfulness, Lord, unto me.

Amen. Thanks so much Jen.

Hymn (BPW 553) **Great is Thy Faithfulness**

Great is thy faithfulness, O God my father,
You have fulfilled all your promise to me;
You never fail and your love is unchanging,
All you have been you for ever will be.

Chorus

Great is thy faithfulness!

Great is thy faithfulness!

Morning by morning new mercies I see;

All I have needed your hand hath provided;

Great is thy faithfulness, Father, to me.

Summer and winter, and springtime and harvest,
Sun, moon and stars in their courses above
Join with all nature in eloquent witness
To your great faithfulness, mercy and love.

Chorus

Pardon for sin, and a peace everlasting,
Your living presence to cheer and to guide;
Strength for today, and bright hope for tomorrow -
These are the blessings your love will provide.

Chorus

Offering

Lord, for all the good gifts of life we praise your holy name. Receive the gifts we offer this week, and bless the world around us through the offering of our lives. Amen.

Our prayers this week are led by Denise Rée.

Prayers of Intercession

Lord, we come before you now with our prayers for the world.

We think about your wonderful creation and how we treat it. Help us to look for ways to heal the hurt that we cause. We bring before you all those who suffer with health or well-being issues and try to help those in need.

We pray for leaders around the world dealing with the details of running their countries; help them to lead by example, and fairly.

We bring the UK to you, Lord, as we start to open up after the pandemic. Be with us all as we deal with it in a way that we feel right. Help us not to be judgemental but to understand how others are feeling.

As services get back to a near-normal experience at Hearsall, we thank you that we are together again.

We also pray for those who still feel that it's not quite the right time, and ask you to comfort and hold them in your arms until they meet again with us.

We lift before you now in a moment of reflection those we have in our hearts. Help us to care for our world and those around us, and keep us safe.

Amen

Many thanks Denise for those prayers. Let's hear our Bible readings this week from Psalm 145 and from Ephesians 3.

Bible Readings

Psalm 145: 10-18

¹⁰ All your works praise you, LORD;
your faithful people extol you.

¹¹ They tell of the glory of your kingdom
and speak of your might,

¹² so that all people may know of your mighty acts

and the glorious splendour of your kingdom.

¹³ Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom,
and your dominion endures through all generations.

The LORD is trustworthy in all he promises
and faithful in all he does.

¹⁴ The LORD upholds all who fall
and lifts up all who are bowed down.

¹⁵ The eyes of all look to you,
and you give them their food at the proper time.

¹⁶ You open your hand
and satisfy the desires of every living thing.

¹⁷ The LORD is righteous in all his ways
and faithful in all he does.

¹⁸ The LORD is near to all who call on him,
to all who call on him in truth.

Ephesians 3: 14 – 21

A prayer for the Ephesians

¹⁴ For this reason I kneel before the Father, ¹⁵ from whom every family^[a] in heaven and on earth derives its name. ¹⁶ I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, ¹⁷ so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, ¹⁸ may have power, together with all the Lord's holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, ¹⁹ and to know this love that surpasses knowledge – that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.

²⁰ Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, ²¹ to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.

Ephesians 3: 14 - 21

The powerful prayer of Ephesians 3 concerns learning to live in the loving presence of God. Let's do that now as we sing, *How deep the Father's Love for us*.

Song (WT 156) **How deep the Father's Love for us**

Verse 1

How deep the Father's love for us
How vast beyond all measure,
That He should give His only Son
To make a wretch His treasure.
How great the pain of searing loss,
The Father turns His face away,
As wounds which mar the Chosen One
Bring many sons to glory.

Verse 2

Behold the Man upon a cross,
My sin upon His shoulders;
Ashamed, I hear my mocking voice
Call out among the scoffers.
It was my sin that held Him there
Until it was accomplished;
His dying breath has brought me life
I know that it is finished.

Verse 3

I will not boast in anything,
No gifts, no power, no wisdom;
But I will boast in Jesus Christ,
His death and resurrection.
Why should I gain from His reward?
I cannot give an answer;
But this I know with all my heart
His wounds have paid my ransom.

Sermon

Be Prayerful

The Lord is near to all who call on him,

to all who call on him in truth. Psalm 145:18

Once there was a very busy writer. Every day she would clatter away at her typewriter desperate to pour her thoughts onto the page before time ran out. She used to wonder, *How can I increase my output? I'm being too slow.* Then she hit upon an idea. She would miss out unnecessary characters as she typed. She even missed out the spaces! After all, they were just expressions of nothing. Why bother with spaces? Sure enough she typed about 20% more characters per hour. But of course there was a problem, and it was this: Her writing was now very difficult to read as all the words butted up against each other.

It's a silly story making a serious point. **Prayer is like the gaps between words.** It enables us to make sense of the sequence of events in our lives. It's so easy to dash from one thing to another without drawing breath. A tiny gap between things may seem like a waste of time in a busy day. In fact, it enables us to make sense of all that is going on. To cut out prayer is like cutting out the gaps between words.

* * *

A man had arranged a garden party for his village. There was a lot to organise. Gazebos needed erecting, food needed arranging, wet weather needed planning for, drinks needed cooling, plants needed trimming, grass needed cutting.... As people arrived, guests needed welcoming, introductions needed to be made, a toast needed proposing, the mayor needed acknowledging, loners needed introducing to other people. As the party progressed all was well, though our intrepid host was like the proverbial swan, calm on the surface and underneath working like a Trojan to ensure everything went smoothly. But when the mayor began to make a slightly risqué joke, stress began to affect our hero's body, but only one person noticed. His wife, seeing what no one else had seen - his brow beginning to furrow and his lips beginning to purse - slipped her hand in his and instantly all was well again and he brushed off the mayor's indiscretion with some warm and polite remarks.

Prayer is a way of staying in touch with God, and when things seem stressful, it's like Jesus slipping his hand in ours and reassuring us. *I am with you always*. It's okay!

* * *

A person is later than they wanted to be for a job interview. As they approach the venue - oh no - there are temporary traffic lights on account of roadworks and they turn red as our interviewee approaches. But do you know what? It gives them time to ponder for a moment. They have to stop. They remember they have allowed twenty minutes in their planning to allow for any delays. They remember why they want this job. They compose themselves again and are ready for their interview.

Prayer is like a stop sign in life. We may so much want to carry on to the next thing, but a person who accepts the discipline of prayer is one who refuses to be driven along by life's continual demands. **Prayer says: STOP!** Not as in 'stop the world; I want to get off'. More as in, 'stop the world, I want to remember who I am'.

* * *

A protester holds a banner aloft, campaigning against HS2. She is demanding a stop to the destruction of ancient woodlands and wants to make her protest clear. She writes her sign big and holds it high.

Prayer is a protest against the relentless demands of the day. I do not have to do whatever my phone or email or job or to-do-list demands right this instant. One popular Christian book was called 'The Purpose-driven life'. It was an effective book that helped many people, but, for me, the title was all wrong. Christians are not driven by demands, but called by love. **Prayer is a protest against the idolatry of activity.**

* * *

A man is making a long journey by train. He remembers tasks he has not completed as he travels, and some of them pertain to the journey he is making. At a station he has a forty-minute wait. He sits in a café with his iPad and remembers a booking he had wanted to make for dinner, a taxi he had planned to arrange, a couple of emails he ought to have sent. Printed on the menu of the café is the wifi code. He logs on and, as he enjoys a pot of English breakfast tea, he completes all of his tasks in the thirty minutes that now remain.

Prayer is like getting that wifi code. **Prayer logs us on to God's kingdom**, and connects us with the values, the vision, the help, the information and the power we need to live well. It might take a moment to log on, but we can achieve so much more if we do.

* * *

At an evening party in Argentina, a woman is tired and jaded. Her friend has dragged her to this late night do, and she's only there to please her. In the corner of the crowded room, she sags a bit. But then her friend is handed a guitar and starts to play. She's strumming out a strong rhythm and sings a lilting melody in Spanish. Tired as she is, our woman's feet rebel against her flagging spirit. She taps them to the rhythm of the guitar, and then her hands begin to clap and then, for half an hour or so, her tiredness evaporates and she's on her feet, dancing a South American dance.

Prayer is like hearing the rhythm of life. There are times to rest and times to serve. Times to dance and times to sleep. Times to do one thing and times to do another. If all the notes of a melody were played at the same time, we would have disharmony, a mere noise. When life feels like noise to us, prayer sets the rhythm. We do the thing we are given to do now, and, when the moment is right, well then, we'll do the next thing. The rhythm of prayer helps us to sound the note we are called to sound, at the moment we are called to sound it. The next note? Well, that's in the next bar.... To pray and live this way is to know true joy.

* * *

A father is trying to lose weight for his daughter's wedding. He reckons he needs to lose 12 pounds in order to fit into his old wedding suit, and he longs to walk his daughter down the aisle in the suit he wore when he married her mother... The trouble is, the scales are old and he's not sure how accurate they are. Also, body weight varies over the day and according to what he's wearing. He's unsure how to track his progress. His wife buys him some new scales and helps him to set a regime for accurate weighing once a week before breakfast every Saturday morning, wearing only his boxers.

Prayer is like a recalibration. Hemmed in by other people's expectations and goals,

it's so easy to forget what really matters. Prayer is an instant **recalibration of our values**. When we pray we assess what we're doing through the recalling of what really matters in life: gratitude, hope, justice, truth, mercy and love.

* * *

A teenager is off on a hike through the Lake District fells. She knows she must be sensible and keep her phone charged up. Her friend lends her a portable recharger, so, when her battery runs out of power, she can top it up again wherever she is. And her mum gives her some Kendal mint cake. When her energy begins to flag, she can get an instant burst of glucose to keep her body going.

To pray is to take a moment to recharge our batteries. We pause and open our spirits and our hands, and receive the energy we need from God.

* * *

A man is aware of the pitfalls of life. He is good-looking, successful, wealthy, and he has seen men like him fall prey to all sorts of temptations. So he keeps a photograph of himself and his wife and his two children in his wallet. When he is tempted to cut corners on a business deal, or when a pretty colleague flirts with him, he takes out his wallet and remembers who he is: a beloved husband and a father in a beautiful family.

Prayer reminds us of who we are. In prayer we pause to consider: We are children of God, followers of Christ, citizens of heaven, friends of the poor and custodians of the Earth. This is who we are; so, how then shall we live?

* * *

*The Lord is near to all who call on him
to all who call on him in truth.*

Whenever we call on him, we make that reconnection. Pray wherever you are, and pray whenever you meet a challenge. God will give you the values, the framework, the energy, the insight you need. We can take this verse as a promise. He is near to us as we call on him in truth.

Well, what did you make of the sumptuous prayer we heard from Ephesians?

Traditionally attributed to Paul writing in Rome around AD 62, some have suggested

it might have been written later, by some disciple of Paul, after his death. But one of the arguments against Paul's authorship is simply that the style and theology have deepened and broadened compared with earlier writings we accept as Paul's. But that argument forgets an obvious fact: Great thinkers develop their thought over time and a person's later theology or philosophy may well have blossomed into something new when compared with their earlier ideas.

So I regard this as coming from Paul. He had stayed with the church in Ephesus on a couple of occasions - once for three years, so he knew them well. So from a mature perspective, praying for his dear friends in faraway Asia Minor, he opens his heart to them once more.

So, what did you make of Paul's prayer for the Ephesians?

It's not a prayer for things. Paul is not asking for possessions or wealth.

It's not a prayer for an easy ride in a sometimes hostile world. It's not even a prayer for protection.

It's not a prayer for healing. It's not a prayer for forgiveness.

So what kind of prayer is it? What does Paul actually ask God for on behalf of his old congregation?

He asks for **strength**: for power through God's Spirit, so that Christ lives in their hearts as they trust him.

He asks that they may be rooted and established in **love**. We used to say rooted and *grounded* in love. There's an implicit agricultural metaphor here. A plant is entirely dependent on the particular bit of ground it happens to be planted in. Paul prays that their very being - their souls, but also their earthly existence - may be rooted and grounded, established and firm - in love. Paul is asking that the day-to-day existence of the church will be entirely based on love. That love will nurture them. That love will root them. That love will stabilise them.

And then - as a group - together with all the saints - he wants them to grasp something, He wants them, as we say in current parlance, to **get** something. He wants them to get how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ. He wants them to really get it!

That love is deeper than their most frightening of challenges. The love of Christ is wider than any challenge that might come their way. That love endures longer than any earthly threat. That love is higher than any earthly joy. Love like an ever-expanding sphere around them - they can never be beyond its reach. Paul wants the Ephesians to get this.

And then, in his excitement, Paul stumbles into contradiction - he wants them to know something that is way beyond knowing. This love is so extensive that we can't adequately put it into words - it's an experience and reality so strong that no language can capture it. And yet he says: try to capture it anyway!

And he prays that they may be filled with all the fullness of God. This can mean that they may be made complete in the way that God is complete. Our Psalm declared that *all your works will praise you*. Every individual thing that exists brings praise to God, for it was created by him. And so are these Ephesians - they belong to him, and, unlike inanimate objects and unlike many humans - these Ephesians can get something of an understanding of this vision of love.

We often ask God for things. Ask away! *Delight yourself in the Lord and he will give you the desires of your heart*, says Psalm 37.

But Paul's prayer is for a complete transformation of consciousness. He ends with praise to the God who does not just do more, but far more, immeasurably more, than anything we can ask for - even anything we can imagine. And so to pray, is to seek his glory in the church and in Christ Jesus and throughout all generations and beyond all the centuries.

So we may ask for things, but in this prayer at least, prayer is not about asking God to change his plans to fit in with our convenience. It's a prayer that Christians will have their consciousness transformed by a vision of love.

It's this vision that we feel and partially understand when we stop and pray. Prayer is the gap between things that help us make sense of those things. It's the stop sign that helps us remember who we are. It's a connection with God's kingdom. It's the reassuring hand of God in our own hand. It's the rhythm of joy. It's a filling up of energy. Prayer helps us work more effectively for God's kingdom of justice and peace. So... Pray!

Our closing hymn encourages us to take all our concerns to God in prayer,
What a friend we have in Jesus.

Hymn (BPW 603) **What a friend we have in Jesus**

Verse 1

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!

Verse 2

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!

Verse 3

Are we weak and heavy laden,
Cumbered with a load of care?
Precious Saviour, still our refuge,
Take it to the Lord in prayer!
Do thy friends despise forsake thee?
Take it to the Lord in prayer!

In His arms He'll take and shield thee;
Thou wilt find a solace there.

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.