

Order of Service 14th November 2021

Remembrance Sunday

Woody from the Jaws of Distress

Welcome

Hello, and welcome to Hearsall at Home for 14th November 2021, Remembrance Sunday. We will be continuing our series on Job, and, if you want to read along for next Sunday, please look through chapters 38 - 41.

Call to Worship

We gather

Let us worship God

We gather to remember

Let us worship God

We gather to remember men and women of courage

Let us worship God

We gather to remember the price of peace

Let us worship God together. Amen.

As God's gathered people, we sing a hymn asking for the courage to live life courageously, as did so many of the people we are remembering today.

Hymn (BPW 523) **Father, Hear the Prayer We Offer**

Father, hear the prayer we offer:

not for ease that prayer shall be,
but for strength, that we may ever
live our lives courageously.

Not for ever in green pastures
do we ask our way to be;
but by steep and rugged pathways
would we seek you fearlessly.

Not forever by still waters
would we idly rest and stay;
but would smite the living fountains
from the rocks along our way.

Be our strength in hours of weakness,
in our wanderings be our guide;
through endeavour, failure, danger,
Father, be thou at our side.

Opening Prayer

On this solemn Sunday of Remembrance we acknowledge you:
Lord of all eternity;
Faithful One through thousands of generations;
Saviour to all nations;
Source of all life;
Measure of all love;
Discloser of all truth;
Provider of all comfort;
Judge of all hearts...

To us, so often, war presents itself as a necessary evil.

When we judge wrongly;
when we attack the innocent;
when we prefer violence to the exacting search for peace;
when we prefer weak resignation to courageous resolve;
when we are blind to your image in others...
forgive us and renew us
for the sake of your Son
and for the peace of the world. Amen.

The Lord's Prayer

Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,

your will be done,
on earth as 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 for ever.
Amen.

Our prayers are led by Anne Thompson.

Prayers of Intercession

Dear Father God,

We come to church to meet with you today and to remember all those who lost their lives in wars in the past, and we acknowledge that there are many people still losing their lives in conflicts all around the world today, making the ultimate sacrifice. We think of the families of all those who have lost loved ones in wars. All of them fathers, husbands, wives, mothers, sons and daughters, brothers and sisters, or friends of someone. Help them to rebuild their lives and look after and provide for their families. We ask you to hold them in your hands, Lord.

Why do we never learn to live in peace, Lord? Why are leaders so greedy for power that they put their own people's lives in such danger and value them so little? They impose their views and values upon other countries and peoples and terrorise minority groups.

We pray to you in the hope that the leaders of these countries will become better leaders or that other leaders will come forward to bring peace and a just rule. Help the people of the world to work together for the common aim of saving the planet for all people and to minimise the effects of climate change. These are far more important and pressing issues. We know it is those who contribute to global warming the least that suffer the effects the most. Bless them and be with them and help them not to feel forgotten and punished by the actions of the rest of us.

Be with the world's leaders as they go back to their countries after the COP26 summit and start working towards the goals they promised to achieve, and also to make the funds they promised available to mitigate the effects. Help us all to change our lifestyles and expectations to achieve a common aim.

Hold all those who are still suffering from the Covid virus, or the after effects of it, in your hands, Lord. Be with all those who have lost family members to it and also be with all our healthcare and key workers as they struggle to keep the NHS and our supply systems going.

We think of those who have been bereaved, or are ill or having treatment and also those still waiting for results or treatment. They are many, Lord, and we each will personally know many more. We think of the people who have been on the prayer chain and the WhatsApp prayer group, and in our prayer book in the foyer. We pray for any others known to us and on our hearts in the following short silence.

We ask all these things in the name of your precious son, Jesus Christ.
Amen.

Many thanks Anne, for those prayers.

Offertory prayer

Lord, all things come from you and of your own do we give you. Please use these and all our gifts to bless your world. Amen.

Let's reaffirm our commitment to Jesus as our Lord. His incarnation, his words, his suffering, death and resurrection, are the pattern for our lives. He is here with us by the power of the Holy Spirit, and we enthrone him as our Lord...

Song (WT 246) **Jesus, We Enthroned You**

Verse

Jesus we enthrone You;
We proclaim You our King.
Standing here in the midst of us,
We raise You up with our praise.

Chorus

*And as we worship, build a throne,
And as we worship, build a throne,
And as we worship, build a throne.
Come Lord Jesus and take Your place.*

Repeat Verse, then *Chorus x 2*

Act of Remembrance

The righteous person, though they die early, will be at rest. For old age is not honoured for length of time, not measured by number of years; but understanding is grey hair, and a blameless life is ripe old age.

The righteous live for ever and their reward is with the Lord; the Most High takes care of them. Therefore they will receive a glorious crown and a beautiful diadem from the hand of the Lord, because with his right hand he will cover them and with his arm he will shield them.

Friends, let us remember in silence before God all those who have died in war.

TWO MINUTES' SILENCE

They shall grow not old, as we that are left grow old:
Age shall not weary them, nor the years condemn.
At the going down of the sun and in the morning
We will remember them.

Almighty Father, you call your children to live as brothers and sisters in love and harmony, and have given your Son to be our Saviour, the Prince of Peace; grant that we, who are called by his name, may yield our lives to your service, and strive for reconciliation, understanding and peace in all our relationships; for the sake of Jesus Christ our Lord.

And now we sing that hymn of searching for justice: I have a dream a man once said....

Hymn (BPW 625) **I Have a Dream a Man Once Said**

“I have a dream”, a man once said,
“where all is perfect peace;
where men and women, black and white,
stand hand in hand, and all unite
in freedom and in love.”

But in this world of bitter strife
the dream can often fade;
reality seems dark as night,
we catch but glimpses of the light
Christ sheds on humankind.

Fierce persecution, war, and hate
are raging everywhere;
through struggles and through sacrifice
God's people pay the costly price
of standing for the right.

So dream your dreams and sing your songs,
but never be content:
for thoughts and words don't ease the pain:
unless there's action, all is vain;
faith proves itself in deeds.

Lord, give us vision, make us strong,
and help us to do your will;
nor let us rest until we see
your love throughout humanity
uniting us in peace.

Let's hear our Bible readings from Job and from Mark.

Bible Readings

Job 36:13-37:1

¹³ ‘The godless in heart harbour resentment;

even when he fetters them, they do not cry for help.

¹⁴ They die in their youth,

among male prostitutes of the shrines.

¹⁵ But those who suffer he delivers in their suffering;

he speaks to them in their affliction.

¹⁶ 'He is wooing you from the jaws of distress

to a spacious place free from restriction,

to the comfort of your table laden with choice food.

¹⁷ But now you are laden with the judgment due to the wicked;

judgment and justice have taken hold of you.

¹⁸ Be careful that no one entices you by riches;

do not let a large bribe turn you aside.

¹⁹ Would your wealth or even all your mighty efforts

sustain you so you would not be in distress?

²⁰ Do not long for the night,

to drag people away from their homes.

²¹ Beware of turning to evil,

which you seem to prefer to affliction.

²² 'God is exalted in his power.

Who is a teacher like him?

²³ Who has prescribed his ways for him,

or said to him, "You have done wrong"?

²⁴ Remember to extol his work,

which people have praised in song.

²⁵ All humanity has seen it;

mortals gaze on it from afar.

²⁶ How great is God – beyond our understanding!

The number of his years is past finding out.

²⁷ 'He draws up the drops of water,

which distil as rain to the streams;

²⁸ the clouds pour down their moisture

and abundant showers fall on mankind.

²⁹ Who can understand how he spreads out the clouds,

how he thunders from his pavilion?

³⁰ See how he scatters his lightning about him,

bathing the depths of the sea.

³¹ This is the way he governs the nations
and provides food in abundance.

³² He fills his hands with lightning
and commands it to strike its mark.

³³ His thunder announces the coming storm;
even the cattle make known its approach.

37 'At this my heart pounds
and leaps from its place.

Mark 4: 35 - 41

Jesus calms the storm

³⁵ That day when evening came, he said to his disciples, 'Let us go over to the other side.' ³⁶ Leaving the crowd behind, they took him along, just as he was, in the boat. There were also other boats with him. ³⁷ A furious squall came up, and the waves broke over the boat, so that it was nearly swamped. ³⁸ Jesus was in the stern, sleeping on a cushion. The disciples woke him and said to him, 'Teacher, don't you care if we drown?'

³⁹ He got up, rebuked the wind and said to the waves, 'Quiet! Be still!' Then the wind died down and it was completely calm.

⁴⁰ He said to his disciples, 'Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?'

⁴¹ They were terrified and asked each other, 'Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey him!'

Lord, may my words and our reflections be pleasing in your sight. Amen.

Sermon

Woed from the Jaws of Distress

81 years ago today, on the night of the 14th November 1940, 449 German bombers dropped 30,000 incendiary bombs on the city of Coventry, destroying 2,306 houses, damaging 73 factories and killing 568 people.

In four raids between 13 and 15 February 1945, the British and Americans dropped more than 3,500 tonnes of bombs on Dresden, killing an estimated 25,000 people.

The intention of these bombing campaigns, along with the crippling of industry, was the breaking down of community spirit by terrorising their survivors into inhumane behaviour. Although other cities experienced larger scale attacks, the one on Coventry was very concentrated, producing an intense effect and leaving many bewildered the next morning, though some were stronger and simply turned up for work.

But as those who visit terror on civilians continue to discover, the human spirit is stronger than that. The people of Coventry have proved that is true, rebuilding our cathedral, our city and our spirit in defiance of evil. When evil arises, some may be tempted to capitulate, to give up and lose the will to live. But in one another we find the courage to continue.

* * *

What does it feel like when we **do** lose our courage? What does it feel like to lose the will to live? It can feel like our insides turning to liquid. It can really feel as if the heart is in the mouth. The throat can be dry. We may feel nausea and wish to hide in our beds.

As the twenty-second Psalm memorably puts it:

*I am poured out like water,
and all my bones are out of joint.
My heart has turned to wax;
it has melted within me.
My mouth is dried up like a potsherd,
and my tongue sticks to the roof of my mouth;
you lay me in the dust of death.*

Job is an individual who has felt this way. A single one of his tragedies might have broken the spirit of a lesser man. Brought together: the deaths of his children, the ravaging of his means of making a living, the sickness of his body; all brought him to the edge of the pit.

His wife has urged him to give up. His three friends have explained that he is being

punished for his secret sins. His community has failed to nurture his spirit. But then, like the fourth tempter in T. S. Eliot's *Murder in the Cathedral*, a **fourth** comforter comes - quite unexpected, as we are used to things coming in threes.

This fourth comforter Elihu began to speak way back in chapter 32. A young man, he harbours a young man's anger, though he has waited his turn out of respect for his elders. But he insists, God's Spirit is also in him, a young man, and wisdom does not belong only to the aged. Words have failed his senior friends, but now, now he will speak. Echoes of Cop 26...

Although Elihu clings to the old idea that our bad fortunes are punishments for bad behaviour, he also points Job towards the **transcendence** of God. He says that those near to the pit of death may find an angel at their side. He emphasises that God remains available to all who suffer. In today's chapter - chapter 36 - we hear that God, though mighty, despises no one.

It's the godless who harbour resentment and do not cry out for help. And, in a poetic verse that gives me my title this morning, Elihu says:

*He is wooing you from the jaws of distress
to a spacious place free from restriction,
to the comfort of your table laden with choice food.*

So Elihu insists that love is always God's intention, and that all things will yet be well. From the jaws of distress, God speaks love; he woos. Even in the moment of affliction, a spacious place, and the comfort of a laden table, remain viable destinations for the sufferer.

Can it be so? That mystic lady, Julian of Norwich, who experienced a suffering that almost took her life, declared:

*Thus I was taught that love was our Lord's meaning. And I saw quite clearly in this and in all, that before God made us, he loved us, which love was never slaked nor ever shall be. And in this love he has done all his work, and in this love he has made all things profitable to us. And in this love our life is everlasting. In our creation we had a beginning. But the love wherein he made us was in him with no beginning.
And all this shall be seen in God without end.*

If you are suffering greatly right now, can you begin to believe that Love is Christ's meaning for you, even from the very jaws of distress? Can you trust that this love is without beginning or end? Love is prior to your birth, love is after your death, love is more real than you, and in him you are held forever secure.

Now Elihu's poetry gets clever... After holding out the possibility of a table **laden with food**, he adds this:

*But you now are
laden with the judgment
due to the wicked;
judgment and justice have taken hold of you.*

Job has a choice - to be weighed down by judgment or to sit at a table weighed down by food.

Elihu is less inclusive than Mother Julian. *Be careful*, he says to Job, behave yourself. *Do not long for the night where evil may be covered by darkness*. Elihu still believes that suffering is caused by sin.

But those afflicted by suffering often do have a choice. They can either give up and be crushed by suffering and sin - or, like a city rebounding after the devastation of a wartime blitz, they can dare to harbour hope; they can strain to hear Christ's song of love in the moment of their deepest pain.

From his still somewhat unpalatable theology, Elihu begins to set the scene for what comes next in this strange and mysterious book - a sense of the majesty and greatness of God, who fills his hands with lightning, whose coming is announced by thunder.

At this my heart pounds and leaps from its place...

our reading concludes.

So, in the soil of his traditional belief that bad fortunes result from bad behaviour, Elihu has cultivated something more hopeful: the tree of life.

* * *

On this solemn day of remembrance, we remember before God those who gave their lives that others might live in peace. We honour all who continue to stand up to evil, whether in Kabul or Coventry, Beijing or Belfast.

And for us, three closing applications.

First of all, a personal one... If anyone listening to this has felt crushed and defeated... If you have felt that in the past, or if you feel it in the future, remember - God woos you from the jaws of distress. It may be that only at the darkest of moments, when the human spirit flirts with despair, that we are at last able to grasp the solid eternal love of God. When the sun sets we may be able to see the stars shine.

Secondly, a church one... If our little church or your big church or any other church reaches disagreement, uncertainty, disappointment, scandal or setback, there may be a temptation to sink into despair and give up. But might it be the case that only now, precisely in this situation of helplessness, do we truly hear Christ's call to his church? Do we need for our plans and schemes and visions and ideas to come to nothing, so that we realise that God says, *I am the Lord and there is no other, my arm is not too short to save, and See, I do a new thing?* Doubt a twelve point mission statement; doubt a trendy new theology book; doubt a pastor's enthusiasm; doubt an architect's drawing; but do not doubt this: Christ is a great Saviour and he will never leave us nor forsake us and his love endures forever.

Thirdly, a global one... Last week we reflected on how our planet is screaming for release, and how young people often lead the way forward. Cop 26 heard Prince Charles evoke a wartime spirit in the fight against climate change. In the face of a powerful, cruel and violent fascist regime with ambitions to subdue the globe, people fought back and gave their lives for a better future. Devastated cities collectively found the will to live again. Can the whole world rediscover that resilience, and that will to love once more, in the face of looming climate catastrophe?

Finally, all these applications are bound up with each other... The distress of the world's ecosystems may keep us up at night... The church of the future must be net carbon zero... The viability of the church in a changing world may trouble us... But

we open our hearts to the God who gives us the right to be called his children, and who never gives up on us. For love is his meaning, and his love is never slaked.

Closing Songs, (WT 410, 76 and 344)

So, in the face of war and all the challenges of life, we remember that God's steadfast love never ceases, that Christ always remains with us and that he bids us share his peace and power. We celebrate that in our three closing songs...

Song (WT 410) **The Steadfast Love of the Lord Never Ceases**

The steadfast love of the Lord never changes;

His mercies never come to an end;

They are new every morning,

New every morning.

Great is Thy faithfulness, O Lord,

Great is Thy faithfulness.

Repeat

They are new every morning,

New every morning.

Great is Thy faithfulness, O Lord,

Great is Thy faithfulness,

Great is Thy faithfulness.

Song (WT 76) **Emmanuel, Emmanuel**

Emmanuel, Emmanuel,

His name is called Emmanuel.

God with us, revealed in us,

His name is called Emmanuel.

Emmanuel, Emmanuel,

His name is called Emmanuel.

God with us, revealed in us,

His name is called Emmanuel.

God with us, revealed in us,

His name is called Emmanuel.

Song (WT 344) **Peace I Give to You (as a round)**

Peace I give to you, I give to you my peace. X 2

Chorus:

Let it flow to one another, let it flow, let it flow.

Let it flow to one another, let it flow, let it flow.

Love I give to you, I give to you my love. X2

Chorus

Hope I give to you, I give to you my hope. X 2

Chorus

Joy I give to you, I give to you my joy. X 2

Chorus

Grace I give to you, I give to you my grace. X 2

Chorus

Power I give to you, I give to you my power. X 2

Chorus

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.