

Order of Service for 28th November 2021

First Sunday of Advent and The Toy Service

Dust and Glory

Welcome

Hello, and welcome to Hearsall at Home for 28th November 2021, the first Sunday in Advent. Today we conclude our series on Job and look forward to the coming of Jesus, the light of the world.

Lighting of the first Advent Candle (Using BPW 154 for the liturgy)

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

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

Anyone wishing to bring forward toys and other items for Coventry City Mission may do so during the opening hymn.

Carol **O Come, O Come Emmanuel**

Verse 1

O come, O come Emmanuel
And ransom captive Israel,
That mourns in lonely exile here
Until the son of God appear.

Chorus

*Rejoice, rejoice, Emmanuel
Shall come to thee, O Israel.*

Verse 2

O come thou dayspring from on high
And cause thy light upon us to rise;
Disperse the lonely clouds of night
And death's dark shadow put to flight.

Chorus

Verse 3

O come, our great high priest and intercede,
Thy sacrifice our only plead.
The judgement we no longer fear;
Thy precious blood has brought us near.

Chorus

*Rejoice, rejoice, Emmanuel
Shall come to thee, O Israel.*

Verse 4

O come, thou king of Nations, bring
An end to all our suffering,
Bid every pain and sorrow cease
And reign on now, the Prince of Peace.

Chorus

Opening prayer

Lord, renew the world with hope!
So many of us feel doubting, dusty, hopeless and hurting...
We believe a little; help us in our unbelief!
We have the earth's dirt on our feet; wash us and make us clean!
The fears of humanity seep into our hearts; grant us a realistic hope!
We come with the burden of guilt; forgive us and set us free!

See, the Lord's anointed is coming!

Born among the poor;
God's presence in human flesh;
blazing light piercing the darkness of oppression;
song of joy drowning out the jingles of consumerism;
ancient wisdom; judge of every heart; Saviour of souls; righter of wrongs; Lord of all
the universe; prince of all peace... Come, Lord Jesus, Come!

We worship and adore you even here and now. 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.

Let's rest for a moment in the loving arms of Jesus. We sing, *Let the Son of God enfold you...*

Song (WT 320) O Let the Son of God enfold you

O let the Son of God enfold you
with his Spirit and his love;
let him fill your heart and satisfy your soul.
O let him have the things that hold you,
and his Spirit like a dove
will descend upon your life and make you whole.

Jesus, O Jesus,
Come and fill your lambs.
Jesus, O Jesus,
Come and fill your lambs.

O come and sing this song with gladness
as your hearts are filled with joy.
Lift your hands in sweet surrender to his name.
O give him all your tears and sadness,
give him all your years of pain,
and you'll enter into life in Jesus' name.

Dedication of toys and donations for Coventry City Mission and Offertory Prayer

Lord, thank you for the work of Coventry City Mission. It's a privilege to be able to offer Christmas gifts to needy children in our city. Take these toys and other gifts and use them as a powerful sign of your saving work. And take our regular gifts to church and other charities, and enable all to extend your kingdom of love, peace, truth and joy. Amen.

We believe that Christ's light changes the world! And we long for his light to shine even through us. Let's sing, *When your pure light shines*.

Song **When Your Pure Light Shines**

When your pure light shines
so brightly in our world,
I see the colours change
from greyness into glory.
Our hearts, like coloured glass
that were so dark and dusty,
turn radiant and lovely
in the glory of your light.

Chorus x 2

Shine within my heart!

Shine within your church!

Shine ever brighter in your world!

The broken and the lonely
are welcome in your church;
the hungry ones are fed
and migrants treated kindly;
slaves at last are freed,
the unemployed find work,
and mourners relearn gladness
in the family of God.

Chorus x 2

Ending:

Shine ever brighter,

Shine ever brighter,

Shine ever brighter in your world.

Our prayers of intercession are led today by Jan Clemons.

Prayers of intercession

Dear Lord, we pray for a better world in these troubling times, especially during the ongoing pandemic and how climate change is with us now, not just something that will be noticeable in the future for our descendants.

We therefore ask you Lord to urge our political and economic leaders to show courage and long-range vision following the UN climate talks three weeks ago in Glasgow. We pray that our government will lead by example, not just for the year ahead while the UK still has presidency until COP27 in Egypt, but far into the future so we can lead by example and show clearly how we will achieve our own targets for climate action and achieving net zero.

We pray for justice and fairness to be at the heart of decisions that are made, and that people of all faiths exert pressure on the governments of the world for action to start immediately, as time seems to be running out to minimise the effects of a changing climate.

We pray that richer nations and financial institutions will help finance poorer nations to develop the technologies to provide greener, cleaner energy, that green jobs are created across our precious planet, bringing hope to millions and that investment in all forms of fossil fuels comes to an end.

Lord, teach us how to act responsibly as stewards of nature as you intended. Help us to protect threatened habitats such as rainforests and wetlands. Pray for the rewilding and restoring of habitats and bring back species on the brink of extinction in the UK such as the osprey, red squirrel and pool frog. Help us to create sustainable agriculture across the world and pray for farmers who will have to change their practices in the coming years as they act more as custodians of natural habitats.

We pray for the Holy Spirit to awaken the hearts of all Christians who have inadvertently damaged God's creation, to see ourselves as pioneers who should lead by example by sharing best practice and to invest in green solutions within our buildings and homes. Finally, give us the courage to speak up for the injustice of climate change as it disproportionately effects the world's poorer nations and to give them the support they need.

We also pray, dear Lord, for migrants and refugees the world over that once again are in the news today. There is no simple solution to fixing this global migration process, especially on the Belarus/Polish border, which is undermining European unity. Migrants need our compassion as they are only seeking safety for themselves and their families. We pray for a wholesale reform of asylum systems and that compassion, sadly lacking from many members of our government, plays an integral part in this process, as this is now becoming a national emergency.

We will now silently pray for those individuals on the prayer chain, in our prayerbook and our own individual concerns and for those people we care about. Amen.

Many thanks, Jan, for those prayers. And we hear our Bible readings from Luke and from Job.

Bible Readings

Luke 21: 25-36

²⁵ 'There will be signs in the sun, moon and stars. On the earth, nations will be in anguish and perplexity at the roaring and tossing of the sea. ²⁶ People will faint from terror, apprehensive of what is coming on the world, for the heavenly bodies will be shaken. ²⁷ At that time they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. ²⁸ When these things begin to take place, stand up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.'

²⁹ He told them this parable: 'Look at the fig-tree and all the trees. ³⁰ When they sprout leaves, you can see for yourselves and know that summer is near. ³¹ Even so, when you see these things happening, you know that the kingdom of God is near.

³² 'Truly I tell you, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things

have happened. ³³ Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.

³⁴ 'Be careful, or your hearts will be weighed down with carousing, drunkenness and the anxieties of life, and that day will close on you suddenly like a trap. ³⁵ For it will come on all those who live on the face of the whole earth. ³⁶ Be always on the watch, and pray that you may be able to escape all that is about to happen, and that you may be able to stand before the Son of Man.'

Job 42: 1-17

42 Then Job replied to the LORD:

² 'I know that you can do all things;
no purpose of yours can be thwarted.

³ You asked, "Who is this that obscures my plans without knowledge?"
Surely I spoke of things I did not understand,
things too wonderful for me to know.

⁴ 'You said, "Listen now, and I will speak;
I will question you,
and you shall answer me."

⁵ My ears had heard of you
but now my eyes have seen you.

⁶ Therefore I despise myself
and repent in dust and ashes.'

Epilogue

⁷ After the LORD had said these things to Job, he said to Eliphaz the Temanite, 'I am angry with you and your two friends, because you have not spoken the truth about me, as my servant Job has. ⁸ So now take seven bulls and seven rams and go to my servant Job and sacrifice a burnt offering for yourselves. My servant Job will pray for you, and I will accept his prayer and not deal with you according to your folly. You have not spoken the truth about me, as my servant Job has.' ⁹ So Eliphaz the Temanite, Bildad the Shuhite and Zophar the Naamathite did what the LORD told them; and the LORD accepted Job's prayer.

¹⁰ After Job had prayed for his friends, the LORD restored his fortunes and gave him twice as much as he had before. ¹¹ All his brothers and sisters and everyone who had known him before came and ate with him in his house. They comforted and consoled him over all the trouble the LORD had brought on him, and each one gave him a piece of silver and a gold ring.

¹² The LORD blessed the latter part of Job's life more than the former part. He had fourteen thousand sheep, six thousand camels, a thousand yoke of oxen and a thousand donkeys. ¹³ And he also had seven sons and three daughters. ¹⁴ The first daughter he named Jemimah, the second Keziah and the third Keren-Happuch. ¹⁵ Nowhere in all the land were there found women as beautiful as Job's daughters, and their father granted them an inheritance along with their brothers.

¹⁶ After this, Job lived a hundred and forty years; he saw his children and their children to the fourth generation. ¹⁷ And so Job died, an old man and full of years.

When these things begin to take place, stand up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near...

In this dusty old world we can tend to walk about with our eyes glued to the ground, absorbed in our own immediate problems. Our next song reminds us to look up, for the Lord is coming; to look up, for the Lord is already here.

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

Verse 1

I looked up

And I saw my Lord a-coming,

I looked up

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

Chorus

Alleluia, He is coming,

Alleluia, He is here.

Alleluia, He is coming.

Alleluia, He is here.

Verse 2

I looked up

And I saw my Lord a-weeping,

I looked up

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

Chorus

Verse 3

I looked up

And I saw my Lord a-dying,

I looked up

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

Chorus

Verse 4

I looked up

And I saw my Lord a-rising,

I looked up

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

Chorus

Alleluia, He is coming,

Alleluia, He is here.

Alleluia, He is coming.

Alleluia, He is here.

And now, Lord, may my words and our thoughts be pleasing in your sight. Amen.

Sermon

Dust and Glory

I want to say some fairly straightforward things about Job 42, as it brings a kind of resolution to this saga of a book.

1 In verses 1 - 6, Job expresses a change of heart.

Then Job replied to the Lord:
2 *'I know that you can do all things;*
no purpose of yours can be thwarted.
3 *You asked, "Who is this that obscures my plans without knowledge?"*
Surely I spoke of things I did not understand,
things too wonderful for me to know.
4 *'You said, "Listen now, and I will speak;*
I will question you,
and you shall answer me."
5 *My ears had heard of you*
but now my eyes have seen you.
6 *Therefore I despise myself*
and repent in dust and ashes.'

After lamenting for so many chapters, Job has come face to face with the God he had demanded to see in court. But the encounter itself was far more disturbing than Job had supposed. His ears had heard of God; now his eyes have seen him!

There's a vital difference between talking about someone, and actually meeting them. We may be quite opinionated about someone else's work, but when we actually meet them in person, and sense their spirit, and feel in our gut what motivates them, well, we may find ourselves taking a wiser, more considered view.

And having met with God, Job does not retract his argument; rather he realises his position has become irrelevant, really. Notice that Job is not told that he is wrong. He has simply come to a realisation that he had been speaking without knowledge. He has been speaking of things that are just too wonderful for him to grasp. His talk was like raving at the Queen at a Palace garden party over a traffic hold-up on the M25 on the way to London.

But if Job has not actually done anything wrong, then why does he repent in dust and ashes according to verse 6? Well, some argue that a better translation here would be 'I repent **from** dust and ashes'. This would mean, *I turn away from my time of wallowing in the dust, from expressing my despair. I have sat in the dust and the ashes long enough, I turn away from them now.* But perhaps he does remain in dust

and ashes for a while to express his regret now at having lamented over-much! Having complained at this God, who was far too wonderful for him to comprehend, he feels a fool. He despises himself.

Either way, here's my first point: **There's a time for the moaning and the despising to stop!** It's okay to be mad at God for a season. God can tolerate our complaints; our disappointment that God is not, in Bob Dylan's telling phrase, "an errand boy to satisfy your wandering desires". But there comes a point when it is just right to stop. We feel it. Enough! This is my first point today: a season of lament and upset has a natural end point. Are you reaching such an end point in your life presently?

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2 Next I want to look at verses 7 to 9.

7 After the Lord had said these things to Job, he said to Eliphaz the Temanite, 'I am angry with you and your two friends, because you have not spoken the truth about me, as my servant Job has. 8 So now take seven bulls and seven rams and go to my servant Job and sacrifice a burnt offering for yourselves. My servant Job will pray for you, and I will accept his prayer and not deal with you according to your folly. You have not spoken the truth about me, as my servant Job has.' 9 So Eliphaz the Temanite, Bildad the Shuhite and Zophar the Naamathite did what the Lord told them; and the Lord accepted Job's prayer.

Job's friends Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar are told by God that they have **not** spoken the truth about God. And yet they would have thought that was exactly what they **were** doing... They were sticking to the orthodox doctrine - telling the truth they knew about the way God worked, rewarding the good; punishing the bad. But no; God says they have not spoken the truth about him.

Formal correct belief is one thing; true witness to God's activity is quite another. They had applied doctrine without love; truth without grace. So here's my second point for today: **Truth without Grace equals Falsehood.**

Okay, in a more nuanced way I might say: **Truth without Grace can never fully or adequately describe God.**

And we may have an understanding about some issue at work, in the family or in the church which is technically correct; but if expressed without compassion, our truth becomes a kind of falsehood. The doctrine of Job's three friends is true in some circumstances; there IS reward for living God's way; there is a cost in turning away from God. But to express that coldly and rigidly and without listening to another is tantamount to misrepresenting God. God is not a doctrine, but the compassionate architect of everything that exists. To reduce God to a doctrine is to lie about God.

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3 There's a third point to make from verses 7 - 9 and it concerns Job's grace. He is asked to pray for the men who have reviled him and signally failed in their moral and spiritual duty to comfort him. A lesser man might have turned away from them and left them to stew in their own theological juices. Job heeds God's call and prays for them. They heed God's call, and sacrifice seven bulls and seven rams for themselves, so that their sin would be covered and their shame expunged. Job cooperates with God's gracious intention for these argumentative, unkind men to be fully rehabilitated into the community of faith.

So here's my third point: **Give difficult people another chance!** God does that. He wants the awkward people, the people with whom we may have argued, to be given a full chance to remain a part of community life. A good and righteous person will take all necessary steps to make that a reality. They may not deserve it. They should have known better. They ought to be kinder.

But remember - God's project is founded on grace, not on people's track records or achievements. He's not a vending machine simply giving people what they've paid for. He's a creator in love and a redeemer in grace, and the basis of his welcome is never our attainment, and is always his mercy. Yes, even for people who've been around the block hundreds of times and should really have known better. The point remains. **God gives difficult people another chance, and so should we.**

* * *

4 Job becomes a living embodiment of God's grace in verses 10 & 11.

10 After Job had prayed for his friends, the Lord restored his fortunes and gave him

twice as much as he had before. 11 All his brothers and sisters and everyone who had known him before came and ate with him in his house. They comforted and consoled him over all the trouble the Lord had brought on him, and each one gave him a piece of silver and a gold ring.

So Job gets double his previous possessions. He holds a big party. His brothers and sisters and acquaintances all come and eat with him. Where were they in his time of need? No matter; to think that way would be back to vending machine theology! **God's** welcome, and therefore **Job's** welcome, is not for people who've been good and perfect; he welcomes people who have let him down to eat at his table. That's what God does. So it's what Job does.

But Job does now benefit. Each guest brings him a piece of silver and a gold ring. This is their token of their restored relationship with Job.

And Job gets materially richer. Job now has fabulous wealth: fourteen thousand sheep; six thousand camels, a thousand yoke of oxen and a thousand donkeys. But after all we've learnt from this book, make no mistake, this wealth is not a reward for good behaviour. Job hasn't **earned** these twenty-two thousand beasts.

He didn't deserve to lose the eleven thousand beasts he had at the start. He didn't deserve to get the twenty-two thousand beasts he had at the end. So here's my fourth point: **God's blessings may come whenever God chooses to send them.** Be open to that.

Have you been going through a lean patch? Is the church feeling a bit wobbly as we recover from covid and worry about building projects? Have you ever felt that God has simply finished with you? Move on! Live a simple, humble, honest and truthful life before him. Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse. Honour God in your praying, your relating, your business, your giving. One day the floodgates of heaven will be thrown open again and uncontainable blessings will return. **God's blessings may come whenever God chooses to send them.** Be on the lookout for them.

* * *

5 And now have a look at verse 13.

13 And he also had seven sons and three daughters.

Perhaps the hardest part of the story was always the deaths of Job's seven sons and three daughters in a desert whirlwind at the beginning of the story. With an exact symmetry which belies the book's narrative section as a folk tale, Job receives seven more sons and three more daughters.

Some listening to this may have had the experience of losing a child. We know that any child born subsequently cannot simply replace the one who died, for he or she was unique. A new child will not be a replica of the one who died, but a fresh soul, with their own distinctive character.

And many of us listening today will have had the experience of losing a husband or a wife. Some will never want to love romantically again. Others may seek and find a new partner. Either way, whether in the shape of new romance or in some other form, there comes a time for the bereaved person when love *in some form or other* becomes realistic and viable.

Some may have had difficult relationships, broken marriages or experienced abuse from those who should have loved them. There are victims of romance scams, unfaithful partners or neglectful spouses. These are issues that may still need to be followed through. Talk to someone you trust.

But even after a particular love has gone sour, love itself remains pure, and it is always possible to love again. So here's my fifth point: **After a time of loss, it's okay to open the heart to love again.**

* * *

6 There's a beautiful twist in verses 14 - 15

14 The first daughter he named Jemimah, the second Keziah and the third Keren-Happuch. 15 Nowhere in all the land were there found women as beautiful as Job's daughters, and their father granted them an inheritance along with their brothers.

This is a delightful outburst of grace that must be fully appreciated. In a quite extraordinary narrative twist, Job's seven new sons remain anonymous but the daughters are all named. Normally in Bible stories, the men get named and the girls are left as nameless, shadowy figures. But here, we meet the girls, and they are beautiful and, what's more, they are each granted an inheritance along with their brothers.

The old way things had always been done was transcended. Patriarchy was not blindly followed. Something fresh emerged. Something beyond the old way of doing business arose, and it was just and lovely and right.

So let me slip in this sixth point: **In a period of blessing, look for God to do new things!** Things that weren't done before! Look for fresh expressions of justice, peace and inclusion. Look for the destruction of old ways that were stale or abusive.

* * *

7 Finally we look at verses 16 - 17, the closing two verses of the book.

16 After this, Job lived a hundred and forty years; he saw his children and their children to the fourth generation. 17 And so Job died, an old man and full of years.

Job is portrayed now as a peer of great father Abraham - living a further 140 years. Rich, blessed, honoured and loved, he dies an old man, and full of years. That expression betokens contentment and peace and blessing. We do not inhabit the strange world of this story, but we can learn yet another point: that how we feel at our very lowest should never be taken as an indicator of how we will always feel. We can go through a spell where life simply feels as if it's not worth living. Hold on; hold firm; let others love you and pray with you and pray for you and believe for you. My last point is this: **However you may be feeling, winter will pass and spring will come again.** For Job, that spring was spectacular: seeing his children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren after his period of suffering...

So let us remember that even after the darkest of winters, spring is coming... In the dust of life, the glory of God may yet shimmer.

Let's sing that powerful old hymn: *Be thou my vision...*

Hymn (BPW 521) **Be Thou my Vision, O Lord of my Heart**

Be thou my vision, O Lord of my heart;
Be all else but nothing, except what thou art;
Be thou my best thought in the day and the night,
Both waking and sleeping, thy presence my light.

Be thou my wisdom, be thou my true word;
Be thou ever with me, and I with thee, Lord;
Be thou my great Father, and I thy true son;
Be thou in me dwelling, and I with thee one.

Be thou my breastplate, my sword for the fight;
Be thou my whole armour, be thou my true might;
Be thou my soul's shelter, be thou my strong tower;
O raise thou me heavenward, great power of my power.

Be thou my true riches, not man's empty praise;
Be thou mine inheritance, now and always;
Be thou and thou only the first in my heart;
O Sovereign of heaven, my treasure thou art.

High King of heaven, thou heaven's bright sun,
O grant me its joys, after victory is won;
Great heart of my own heart, whatever befall,
Still be thou my vision, O Ruler of all.

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.