

Order of Service 16th January 2022

Jesus Spells Plenty

Welcome

Welcome to Hearsall at Home for 16th January 2022. Our service today is called *Jesus Spells Plenty*. It includes a reflection on Jesus turning water into wine at a wedding, and concludes with Holy Communion. Let's be still in Christ's presence now.

Call to Worship

For Zion's sake I will not keep silent,

for Jerusalem's sake I will not remain quiet,

till her vindication shines out like the dawn,

her salvation like a blazing torch.

2 The nations will see your vindication,

and all kings your glory;

you will be called by a new name

that the mouth of the Lord will bestow.

3 You will be a crown of splendour in the Lord's hand,

a royal diadem in the hand of your God.

4 No longer will they call you Deserted,

or name your land Desolate.

But you will be called Hephzibah,

and your land Beulah;

for the Lord will take delight in you,

and your land will be married.

5 As a young man marries a young woman,

so will your Builder marry you;

as a bridegroom rejoices over his bride,

so will your God rejoice over you.

Isaiah 62: 1-5

Hymn (BPW 216) **All Glory, Praise and Honour**

Refrain

*All glory, praise and honour,
to you, Redeemer, King,
to whom the lips of children
made sweet hosannas ring.*

You are the King of Israel,
great David's greater son;
you ride in lowly triumph,
the Lord's anointed one!

Refrain

The company of angels
are praising you on high,
and we with all creation
together make reply:

Refrain

The people of the Hebrews
with palms before you went;
our praise and prayer and anthems
before you we present:

Refrain

To you before your Passion
they sang their hymns of praise;
to you, now high exalted,
our melody we raise:

Refrain

As you received their praises,
accept the prayers we bring,
for you delight in goodness
O good and gracious King!

Refrain

Gratitude is a great source of healing and hope.

Look back over the past week. For what do you feel grateful?

It might be a small thing: a picture given to you by a child; a plant flowering in the winter. It might be a big thing: a relationship discovered or restored; a career opportunity coming your way. It might be that you're in touch with the meaning of regular blessings: air to breathe or food on the table. It might be something specifically spiritual: the gift of Jesus as your Saviour; the fellowship of the worldwide church. Pause now, and give thanks to God...

Lord, your gifts to me are too many to count and too valuable to price. I give you thanks for them all. Open the eyes of my heart so that in all good things: whether in birdsong or in the night sky; whether in the kindness of a stranger or the power of beautiful music; I will see signs of your overflowing love and boundless grace. Most of all I thank you for Jesus, who is the way for me to enter an ocean of mercy, grace and love. Amen.

This love is so great that we want to share it... Let's sing *Far and Near*

Song (WT 82) **Far and Near**

Verse 1

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

Chorus

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

Verse 2

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

Chorus

Say it loud, say it strong!

Tell the world what God has done.

Say it loud, praise His name,

Let the earth rejoice, the Lord reigns!

Verse 3

At His name let praise begin,

Oceans roar, nature sing

For He comes to judge the earth,

In righteousness and in His truth.

Chorus x 2

Offering Prayer

For the privilege of sharing your love with our own gifts we give you our thanks. Please take the water of our own human offerings and transform them into the beautiful wine of your coming kingdom... Amen

Our prayers of intercession are led by Anne Thompson.

Prayers of Intercession

Our Father God, who is our saviour and protector, we bring these prayers to you in the knowledge that you hear us and care for us.

We pray for our world still experiencing the effects of the Covid pandemic and the effects of climate change, and the extreme weather that that brings: deep snow in some parts of the world trapping people in their cars, higher temperatures in others and the devastating effects of wildfires, and yet heavy rain and flooding in others. All these things having tragic effects on the peoples of the world. Help us to see where we have gone wrong, Lord, and help us to put it right and to help those affected by these terrible events.

We pray for the leaders of the world and the difficult decisions they have to make. Help people to work together to bring about change and to put aside their selfish desires to become rich and powerful. Make them mindful of the people that they are responsible for. Open their hearts so they have the welfare of their people as their purpose.

We pray for the leaders of our country and the difficult decisions they have to make regarding Covid and finance, and the NHS and social care. Help them to restore our trust in them and may they find answers to the problems that beset them.

We pray for our NHS, care workers, key workers and teachers because of the extreme pressures they are all under as large numbers of their work force are isolating because of the pandemic. Grant them rest and peace after their long shifts.

Lord, we ask you to be with our missionary friends, Lee and Sarah, and their family in Benin, as they seek to do your work over there, living alongside the people they are helping.

We now pray for those who are ill, awaiting test results or operations, or perhaps some of them are coming near the end of their lives. Hold them all in your hands, Lord, and give them comfort and the knowledge you are with them.

We also pray for the situation in Earlsdon, just down the road from our church that has been on the news, where a child is being held hostage. As I write these prayers, I do not know the outcome, but we pray that the situation will be resolved safely, allowing people isolated in the cordoned off area to continue their lives, and that those involved will have help and support.

We also ask you to be with those who have been bereaved, those who are lonely and those who are anxious about the future. In the following silence we pray for those people particularly known to ourselves.

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

Many thanks Anne for those prayers. We hear now our Bible readings from 1 Corinthians and from John.

Bibles Readings

1 Corinthians 12: 1 - 11

Concerning spiritual gifts

12 Now about the gifts of the Spirit, brothers and sisters, I do not want you to be uninformed. ²You know that when you were pagans, somehow or other you were influenced and led astray to dumb idols. ³Therefore I want you to know that no one

who is speaking by the Spirit of God says, 'Jesus be cursed,' and no one can say, 'Jesus is Lord,' except by the Holy Spirit.

⁴ There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit distributes them. ⁵ There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. ⁶ There are different kinds of working, but in all of them and in everyone it is the same God at work.

⁷ Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good. ⁸ To one there is given through the Spirit a message of wisdom, to another a message of knowledge by means of the same Spirit, ⁹ to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by that one Spirit, ¹⁰ to another miraculous powers, to another prophecy, to another distinguishing between spirits, to another speaking in different kinds of tongues, and to still another the interpretation of tongues. ¹¹ All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he distributes them to each one, just as he determines.

John 2: 1-11

Jesus changes water into wine

2 On the third day a wedding took place at Cana in Galilee. Jesus' mother was there, ² and Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding. ³ When the wine was gone, Jesus' mother said to him, 'They have no more wine.'

⁴ 'Woman, why do you involve me?' Jesus replied. 'My hour has not yet come.'

⁵ His mother said to the servants, 'Do whatever he tells you.'

⁶ Nearby stood six stone water jars, the kind used by the Jews for ceremonial washing, each holding from eighty to a hundred and twenty litres.

⁷ Jesus said to the servants, 'Fill the jars with water'; so they filled them to the brim.

⁸ Then he told them, 'Now draw some out and take it to the master of the banquet.'

They did so, ⁹ and the master of the banquet tasted the water that had been turned into wine. He did not realise where it had come from, though the servants who had drawn the water knew. Then he called the bridegroom aside ¹⁰ and said, 'Everyone brings out the choice wine first and then the cheaper wine after the guests have had too much to drink; but you have saved the best till now.'

¹¹ What Jesus did here in Cana of Galilee was the first of the signs through which he revealed his glory; and his disciples believed in him.

We can always come to Jesus. His love is boundless and amazing. You may have come to worship with some difficulty or pain... Let's take it to the Lord in prayer...

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

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 thy 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.

May the words of my mouth and the thoughts of all of our hearts be pleasing in your sight, O Lord, our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

Sermon

Jesus Spells Plenty

So Jesus and his mother and his friends have been invited to a wedding. What a lovely idyllic story this is. A rustic celebration of young love! See the beautiful blushing bride... Feel the nerves of the young groom... Hear country music played on some simple instruments... Imagine the guests dancing with abandon... See the pride and tears of the mother of the bride... See the glances that secretly pass between the young lovers... What a beautiful story!

But a story without a problem is boring! So, what's the problem? The problem is that the wine has run out. This spells social disaster! Today, this wedding would get a big thumbs down on social media!

And so Jesus' mother - who is never named in John's gospel - alerts him to the problem. Again, in today's terms, maybe it's a cheeky little WhatsApp message - *OMG no more wine!*

Jesus responds, *Woman, why do you involve me...* Now in English, to call someone simply 'woman' can sound like a put-down. In part, that reflects our society's ingrained sexism. But there is only respect in Jesus' voice here when he says, *Woman...* He might have messaged back with a floating question mark. But in John's account we read a rather grand self-reservation from Jesus here: *My hour has not yet come!*

I think that Mary probably knows Jesus needs a bit of a push right now. It's high time he started on his life's mission. She knows he has wondrous powers, and she knows, too, that she can't hang on to him forever. So she ignores his reservations and tells the servants to follow his instructions.

I know other gospels show Mary and her other children seemingly exasperated by Jesus, and wanting to take him home again; to reclaim him as the eldest son in the family home. That was later. Here, now, Mary is in a good place and she nudges Jesus into action.

Well, standing nearby are six stone water jars. The Jewish religion had a pattern of *ritualised washing*. As Christians, we retain something of this in the rite of baptism. Many religions include patterns of hand washing, or whole body washing, as a part

of religious culture. We now know that such practices are in themselves very healthy, and help to prevent the spread of disease. During this time of covid, handwashing, always an essential part of daily life, has gained much greater prominence.

Anyway, hand washing was prescribed by the oral Jewish Law before eating any meal containing bread; along with other rituals and recitations. We can imagine water being poured from one of these jars, perhaps into a convenient jug or bowl, so that wedding guests could meet the detailed requirements of the religious law.

Jesus directs the servants to fill these jars **to the brim...** And then, cool as a cucumber, without saying any magic words or performing some mysterious ritual, he simply says *draw some out*, and instructs the servants to take it to the master of the banquet.

Well, consider those poor servants here. They have to take what had been water from the jar... and offer it to the master of the banquet *as wine*.

Well, here's an extract from a modern wine review: *Deep purple colour. Aromas of rich dark currants, nectarine skins, gushing blackberry, but lots of fragrant tobacco, rich soil, white flowers, smashed minerals and metal. Medium-bodied and saucy but racy acidity stabilises the wine nicely with robust tannins. Deep red currants and ripe cherries, laden with mocha, loamy soil, charred herbs, pencil shavings, roasted hazelnut.*

Hmmm... What sort of review will the master of the banquet give to the 'wine' that has just come from the water jar? He has no idea that the servants have just poured it from that jar! It's just tap water (okay, **well** water) as far as the servants could tell.

But, after he sips this new wine, rolling it around in his mouth, savouring it on his tongue, the master of the banquet is in raptures! It's the first century equivalent of a *1934 Chateau Cheval Blanc Saint-Emilion Premier Grand Cru Classe A...* This stuff retails at £900 per bottle!

So he grabs a special word with the bridegroom to congratulate him. *Like wow*, he says! And he goes into raptures about how normally, you serve the best stuff first and then, when everyone's a bit worse for wear, you serve cheaper plonk. But this bridegroom, well, he's saved the best till last!

Well now, some of us are getting married later this year. How tempting it might be to read this as a way of saving on our drinks bills! But it's much more than that, as the text now makes explicit.

What Jesus did here in Cana of Galilee was the first of the signs through which he revealed his glory; and his disciples believed in him.

This is not much to do with wedding parties! It has a deeper, a broader meaning. So we read the story again...

It was on the **third** day! On the third day Jesus rose from the grave; **three** in Hebrew thought is the number of divine completeness. This is a notable day; something very big is going to happen.

Mary tells the servants to do *whatever Jesus tells them*. We do well if we do... whatever Jesus tells us...

There are **six** water jars for ceremonial washing. Six was the number of humanity. Six is one short of seven, the number of perfection. So even the number of the jars was a code for - *hey, this formal stuff with prayers, and blessings and recitations and rituals - it's one sandwich short of a picnic...*

Along comes Jesus, and suddenly we go from the insufficient water of the ceremonial Law to the overflowing wine of abundance that is the New Covenant.

So this story tells us that religion cannot save us! All the best rituals, the most beautiful sacred music, the most ornate clergy vestments, the most correct rules of behaviour, the rarest incense, the most sublime architecture, the soundest preaching, the most subtle theology of the atonement.... none of that **religion** can save you. Religion, viewed this way, will always fall short.

Jesus revealed his **glory**... In John's gospel, paradoxically, Jesus' **glory** is most clearly seen on the cross. Jesus died to show us that nothing need ever separate us from divine love. We are made to participate in God's loving reality. In Jesus, God prefers to suffer and die, rather than treat us as our sins deserve. In Jesus, divine love is freely offered to the human heart.

And that includes you, today, here and now. You belong to God. You're made to fit in him. God calls you to come home to him. God's love is always enough, always more

than enough, always in the plenty, always in overflowing abundance. That love is freely given, but, as we accept it, we will find ourselves being free channels of love into the world around us. The love of God is not for us to hoard and enjoy alone. The love of God flows from our transformed human hearts. The Love of God changes the world, as it is experienced in a little Baptist church like ours, here and now.

Our reading from 1 Corinthians reminds us that we each share in the **common** Spirit of God. We serve the church and the world in many different ways, but the same Spirit, who pours love into our hearts, is active in each one.

Religion cannot save us. Clinging to the past cannot save us. We may feel small and insignificant as a Baptist church here and now. But Jesus is here, and so we have hope. But our hope is not in sticking to organ music, or getting better guitars. Our hope is not in finding a better preacher, or in managing our buildings.

Our hope is in **Jesus** - in him, everything and everyone fits together. In Jesus there is always enough; always plenty. How can this be so?

I remember reading a commentator on this story from John. He said, this story announces an event in the history of religions: *Christianity replaces Judaism!* But is it not better to say, this story announces the death of all religions viewed in absolute terms.

Religions can be fine, I guess. They bring comfort and familiarity, structure and routine. They provide a kind of cultural container for spiritual encounters...

But you know what? To argue over religions is like arguing over cups. To fight over religions is like fighting over chinaware. What matters is the drink, not the container!

At this time in British culture, with religions generally proving less popular, we can either let this diminish or enhance our respect for the spirituality of other churches and even other religions. Some might hunker down and treat this time of emerging from covid like Custer's last stand, desperately fighting to preserve our traditions, defending what we have left against the onslaught of the modern world. Such a person sees truth as only in **their** community, and sees everything beyond their boundaries as untruth. Others might see this era as an opportunity to find life and love and liberty with all sorts of surprising companions. This person might see the

Spirit of God at work **outside** the boundaries of the church as much as inside. A Christian might be surprised to find she has something in common with her Muslim colleague at work.

And so to think that a particular religion can save you is like saying that a thirsty man in a desert needs a cup - a particular cup. *He does not need a particular cup!* He needs **water!**

Do you need the water of life? You can drink it here, in our religious cup; our Baptist church! You can drink it from other cups too, but, here you are, here we are, and we thirst for the water of life. Christ is here! Let us drink... *And with him, the water turns into wine!*

And, being fully satisfied with the wine of Christ, we need never be superior, or defensive, or possessive or fearful about someone else's religious experience. That's okay - what a beautiful cup you have - so finely carved; so delicately painted - but what we need... is **Jesus!** God's anointed. What we need is the actual presence of God in our hearts, in our community, and to find him and share him and seek him in the world around us!

Christianity makes a claim to uniqueness: Jesus is the Way, the Truth and the Life! Christianity also makes a claim of ubiquity: Christ means God's anointed one. God can anoint wherever God chooses.

What do we mean when we say Jesus is the Way to God? It's not that *Jesus* is like a magic word that you have to pronounce correctly if you want to be saved. It means that **grace** is the only way to be saved. Only through God's free forgiveness for our sins can we come to the Father. Only by trusting in his infinite love are we okay. To say Jesus is the Way, is to say that religion is not the way! Grace is the way.

If someone knows grace in some other religious framework - some other cup; well all well and good. What everyone needs is to come to God on the basis of his undeserved kindness. No religious framework can ever quench your thirst!

Come to the waters and drink! Drink deeply of the love of God... He loves you so deeply that this love can never be fathomed, or understood, or contained, or

controlled, or limited, or traded, or earned, or deserved.... It's not for a particularly moral group of people... It just IS there. Abundant overflowing love is available to all.

Jesus spells plenty, and one reason for this is that he brings us **all** together on the basis of human kindness and love. To say *come to Jesus* is not to call anyone else wrong or to disrespect another Christian tradition, nor even another religion. It's to focus not on the religion, but on what good religion may contain: The presence of God offered on the basis of God's grace. The inclusion of all. The welcome to the broken and the hurting and the lost and the poor and to you and to me because that reflects God's heart!

Let's be still before God right now.

Imagine you are a man, a woman, staggering through the hot desert, desperately thirsty...

Feel the dryness at the back of your throat...

Feel the heat baking your skin... Feel the weight of your feet...

You've not drunk any water for 48 hours...

Finally you reach an oasis... A vendor has a selection of cups, and, beyond him, you can see a pool of crystal clear blue water. How you long to reach that pool.

But first, the vendor insists, you must choose your cup... Will you take the finely-carved ivory goblet; or the plainer, larger wooden beaker; or the lovely Venetian wine glass; or the chipped mug lying on the ground by the pool?

Your choice. Choose. And then go and drink...

Come and drink, says Jesus!

Feel the cool water, sweeter, better than any wine, quenching your thirst, lubricating the back of your mouth, cool, welcome, as it slides down your throat and enters your body.

Come and drink, says Jesus!

Let's continue to drink in the presence of holy love as we sing our next simple, profound and beautiful song in preparation for Holy Communion. *What kind of love is this?*

Song (WT 461) **What Kind of Love is this?**

Verse 1

What kind of love is this

That gave itself for me?

I am the guilty one,

Yet I go free.

What kind of love is this?

A love I've never known;

I didn't even know His name.

What kind of love is this?

Verse 2

What kind of man is this

That died in agony?

He who had done no wrong

Was crucified for me.

What kind of man is this

Who laid aside His throne

That I may know the love of God?

What kind of man is this?

Verse 3

By grace I have been saved;

It is the gift of God.

He destined me to be His son,

Such is His love.

No eye has ever seen,

No ear has ever heard

Nor has the heart of man conceived;

What kind of love is this?

Holy Communion

So we are invited to share in the Lord's supper as each have bread and wine or juice before us in our respective homes.

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

Come to this table, not because you must, but because you may,
Not because you are strong, but because you are weak.

Come, not because any goodness of your own gives you a right to come,
but because you need mercy and help.

Come, because you love the Lord a little and would like to love him more.

Come because he loved you and gave himself for you.

Come and meet the risen Christ, for we are his body.

Let us pray

Almighty God,

to whom all hearts are open,

all desires known,

and from whom no secrets are hidden:

cleanse the thoughts of our hearts

by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit,

that we may perfectly love you,

and worthily magnify your holy name;

through Christ our Lord.

Amen.

We share in the words of 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

The Words of Institution

For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you: the Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, 'This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me.' In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, 'This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me.' For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

Prayer of Thanksgiving

Loving God,

We praise and thank you for your love shown to us in Jesus Christ.

We thank you for his life and ministry,

announcing the good news of your kingdom

and demonstrating its power in the lifting of the downtrodden,

and the healing of the sick,

and the loving of the loveless.

We thank you for his sacrificial death upon the cross for the redemption of the world,

and for your raising him to life again, as a foretaste of the glory we shall share.

We thank you for the bread and wine we have in our homes,

symbols of our beautiful world and signs of your transforming love.

Send your Holy Spirit, we pray,

that we may be renewed into the likeness of Jesus Christ

and formed into his body.

This we pray in his name and for his sake. Amen

Peace

As members of one body, Christ calls us to peace.

Let us invest in one another by praying for each other in our hearts now,
and by sharing signs of peace with one another in the coming hours and days.

Sharing

Of the bread, Jesus said, 'This is my body which is for you; do this in memory of me.'

Of the wine, Jesus said, 'This cup is the new covenant sealed by my blood.

Whenever you drink it, do this in memory of me.'

As we listen to some music, when we feel ready we share bread and wine,
communing with him and with one another.

Closing prayer

Father of all,
we give you thanks and praise,
that when we were still far off
you met us in your Son and brought us home.
Dying and living, he declared your love,
gave us grace, and opened the gate of glory.
May we who share Christ's body live his risen life;
we who drink his cup bring life to others;
we whom the Spirit lights give light to the world.
Keep us firm in the hope you have set before us,
so we and all your children shall be free,
and the whole earth live to praise your name;
through Christ our Lord.
Amen.

Hymn (BPW 636) **O Lord, All the World Belongs to You**

O Lord, all the world belongs to you,
and you are always making all things new;
what is wrong, you forgive,
and the new life you give
is what's turning the world upside down.

The world's only loving to its friends,
but your way of loving never ends;
loving enemies too,
and this loving with you
is what's turning the world upside down.

The world lives divided and apart,
you draw men together and we start
in our body to see
that in fellowship we
can be turning the world upside down.

The world wants the wealth to live in state,
but you show a new way to be great;
like a servant you came,
and if we do the same,
we'll be turning the world upside down.

O Lord, all the world belongs to you,
and you are always making all things new;
send your spirit on all
in your church, whom you call
to be turning the world upside down.

Send your spirit on all
in your church, whom you call
to be turning the world upside down.

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.