

## Order of Service 23rd January 2022

### ***A Pleasing Life***

#### Welcome

Hello, and welcome to Hearsall at Home for 23rd January 2022. Our service is called 'A *Pleasing Life*' as we reflect on the topic of God's word in creation, in the Bible and in Jesus.

#### Call to Worship

For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight.

Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account.

Hebrews 4:12 - 13

Let's enjoy singing George Herbert's words as we praise God in our opening hymn, *King of glory, King of peace.*

#### Hymn (BPW 53) **King of Glory, King of Peace**

King of glory, King of peace,  
I will love you;  
and that love may never cease,  
I will move you.  
You have granted my request,  
you have heard me;  
you have helped me when oppressed,  
you have spared me.

Therefore with my utmost art  
I will sing you,  
deepest love within my heart  
I will bring you.  
Though my sins against me cried,

you did clear me;  
and alone, when they replied,  
you did hear me.

Seven whole days, not one in seven,  
I will praise you;  
in my heart, though not in heaven,  
I will raise you.  
Small it is, in this poor sort,  
to enrol you:  
all eternity's too short  
to extol you.

### Prayers of Praise and Reorientation

Scripture encourages us to find out what pleases the Lord and to live as children of light in all goodness, righteousness and truth.

Loving God, we praise you, for you are the source of all that is good. You are our Creator, the source of life, and you have formed us in your own image and likeness.

Loving God, we praise you for, in Jesus Christ your Son, you demonstrated righteousness to us all and on the cross saved us from all that is unrighteous.

Loving God, we praise you for the gift of the Holy Spirit, who leads us into all truth.

Forgive us, for so often we give you little thought  
and seek only to please ourselves.

Hear our heart's humble cry,  
that we might learn to do what pleases you,  
for in your service is perfect freedom  
and in being humble channels of love,  
you shape us like precious stones  
formed to reflect your glory.

Amen

Let's sing a song celebrating our commitment to be confident witnesses to our loving Lord. *We are marching in the light of God...*

Song (BPW 487) We are Marching in the Light of God

We are marching in the light of God,  
We are marching in the light of God.  
We are marching in the light of God,  
We are marching in the light of God.

We are marching, (we are marching) Oh,  
We are marching, in the light of God.  
We are marching, (we are marching) Oh,  
We are marching in the light of God.

We are living in the love of God,  
We are living in the love of God.  
We are living in the love of God,  
We are living in the love of God.

We are living, (we are living) Oh,  
We are living in the love of God.  
We are living, (we are living) Oh,  
We are living in the love of God.

We are moving in the power of God,  
We are moving in the power of God.  
We are moving in the power of God,  
We are moving in the power of God.

We are moving, (we are moving) Oh,  
We are moving in the power of God.  
We are moving, (we are moving) Oh,  
We are moving in the power of God.

The Lord's Prayer (The Message version)

We pray now in a form of the Lord's Prayer, slowly reflecting on each line and offering ourselves as disciples of Jesus.

Our Father in heaven,  
Reveal who you are.  
Set the world right;  
Do what's best—  
As above, so below.  
Keep us alive with three square meals.  
Keep us forgiven with you and forgiving others.  
Keep us safe from ourselves and the Devil.  
You're in charge!  
You can do anything you want!  
You're ablaze in beauty!  
Yes. Yes. Yes.

All within me falls at your throne! Your Majesty... This life is about You, not about me! We sing, *King of kings, Majesty...*

Song (WT 252) **King of Kings, Majesty**

King of kings, Majesty,  
God of heaven living in me.  
Gentle Saviour, closest friend,  
Strong deliverer, beginning and end.  
All within me falls at Your throne.

*Chorus*

*Your Majesty, I can but bow  
I lay my all before You now.  
In royal robes, I don't deserve  
I live to serve Your Majesty.*

Earth and heav'n worship You,  
Love eternal faithful and true,  
Who bought the nations ransomed souls;  
Brought this sinner near to Your throne.  
All within me cries out in praise!

#### *Chorus*

*Your Majesty, I can but bow,  
I lay my all before You now.  
In royal robes, I don't deserve,  
I live to serve Your Majesty.  
I live to serve Your Majesty.*

#### Offertory Prayer

Lord, for all your wonderful gifts we are forever grateful. Please use our own gifts to make your love real to the world. Amen.

And now Nick Leonard leads our prayers of intercession.

#### Prayers of Intercession

In Philippians we are instructed to “not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and supplication let your requests be made known to God.”... So....Let us pray.

Dear Lord, there are so many people and circumstances that we want to bring before you for your peace, your love and your guidance. We start to try and think of things which we would want to bring to you; but then realise that this is an extremely difficult task, as you care for these people and situations far more than we could ever understand already!

Loving Father, accept our attempts at praying for others - and never let us forget what a privilege it is to bring these prayers to you.

We pray for all those who are working towards making this planet a cleaner, greener

place to live. We pray for those who have been given a deep commitment and love for your world and have dedicated their lives to preserving it.

We pray for all the people, at home and around the world, who have the responsibility to lead in these difficult times. We pray particularly for:

- those who have to make medical and political decisions about Coronavirus,
- Those leading and serving in countries where there are riots and violence flaring up – May you bring your peace to these situations by giving wisdom and generosity to world leaders
- Those caught up in natural or manmade disasters that they have no control over. We pray particularly for those caught in the eruption in Tonga, for those suffering the cold in Afghanistan with little or no food, and for those caught up in the tensions between Russia and Ukraine.

Dear Lord, we pray for the church and all faith communities worldwide. May they be ready to receive and act upon your guidance.

We pray especially for those in our own church and local community, especially those known to us as individuals: (I will leave a gap between each category so you can lift individual situations or people up to the Lord.)

- Anxious about the future or Coronavirus or vaccinations – may you/we give reassurance.
- Concerned or worried about friends or relations – may they find Your peace.
- Those recently bereaved - give them your comfort and understanding.
- Lonely or in need – show us how to recognise and fulfil each other's needs.
- Suffering health problems – either mental or physical - please care for them with the depth that we never could.
- Finding it difficult financially and not being able to provide enough for their families - with the added worry of the impending increase in the price of fuel.
- Having difficult decisions to make for the future of them or their families.
- Our close circle of friends and family. Each individual with their own needs and a unique need for your presence in their lives.

Finally, we pray for your church here in Hearsall as we continue to do our best to follow you and to make the Lord Jesus relevant in these uncertain times. We pray that you will give us guidance and an insight into how we can respond to the new challenges, as we come out of lockdown from Corvid-19.

We pray for your guidance as we seek to build new relationships and partnerships with other churches and commercial companies to grow your presence in this place.

We offer up all these prayers in the name of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ.  
Amen

Our main reading today consists of a poem or the lyrics of a song: Psalm 19.

Bible Reading **Psalm 19**

*For the director of Music. A psalm of David.*

<sup>1</sup> The heavens declare the glory of God;  
the skies proclaim the work of his hands.

<sup>2</sup> Day after day they pour forth speech;  
night after night they reveal knowledge.

<sup>3</sup> They have no speech, they use no words;  
no sound is heard from them.

<sup>4</sup> Yet their voice goes out into all the earth,  
their words to the ends of the world.

In the heavens God has pitched a tent for the sun.

<sup>5</sup> It is like a bridegroom coming out of his chamber,  
like a champion rejoicing to run his course.

<sup>6</sup> It rises at one end of the heavens  
and makes its circuit to the other;  
nothing is deprived of its warmth.

<sup>7</sup> The law of the LORD is perfect,  
refreshing the soul.

The statutes of the LORD are trustworthy,  
making wise the simple.

<sup>8</sup> The precepts of the LORD are right,

giving joy to the heart.

The commands of the LORD are radiant,  
giving light to the eyes.

<sup>9</sup> The fear of the LORD is pure,  
enduring for ever.

The decrees of the LORD are firm,  
and all of them are righteous.

<sup>10</sup> They are more precious than gold,  
than much pure gold;  
they are sweeter than honey,  
than honey from the honeycomb.

<sup>11</sup> By them your servant is warned;  
in keeping them there is great reward.

<sup>12</sup> But who can discern their own errors?  
Forgive my hidden faults.

<sup>13</sup> Keep your servant also from wilful sins;  
may they not rule over me.

Then I will be blameless,  
innocent of great transgression.

<sup>14</sup> May these words of my mouth and this meditation of my heart  
be pleasing in your sight,  
LORD, my Rock and my Redeemer.

We'll be thinking in a little while about pleasing God. Mary, mother of Jesus, is the supreme example of saying Yes to God's plans, even when they would turn her world upside down. We sing, *Let it be to me according to your Word*.

Song (WT 256) **Let It Be To Me**

Let it be to me, according to thy word;

Let it be to me, according to thy word.

I am your servant, no rights shall I demand.

Let it be to me,

Let it be to me,

Let it be to me, according to thy word.



May these words of my mouth  
and this meditation of our hearts  
be pleasing in your sight,  
Lord, my Rock and my Redeemer.

### Sermon

#### ***A Pleasing Life***

C. S. Lewis called Psalm 19 “the greatest poem in the Psalter and one of the greatest lyrics in the world.” Haydn, Bach and others have set it to music. The Psalm itself is headed “For the Director of Music.”

Someone once said that setting a poem to music was like looking at a beautiful view through a stained glass window. A beautiful poem may be prettier and more colourful through a musical setting, but that also risks losing something. As a poet, I must say that generally I prefer to read a naked poem, rather than hearing one clothed in music! Haydn’s elaborate setting of Psalm 19 in his Creation is no doubt a profound blessing to many of you. But me? Well, I like to just read the poem.

Now some dunder-headed commentators of older days insisted that Psalm 19 must be two poems bolted together. Why? Because the first part is about the sun and the second part is about the law of the Lord. Such analysts have become so obsessed with their literary-historical methods that their ears have become deaf to poetry. They fail to see what is right before their eyes.

The first part of the poem is verses 1 - 6. The lines are longer, and the subject is the **heavens**, and specifically the **sun**. In the second part (verses 7 - 11), the lines are shorter, so the rhythm speeds up and the subject is the law of the Lord.

So why do I think a poet wrote about the sun in the sky and then, without any explanation, went on to write about the Law of God? Speaking as a have-a-go poet, the answer is as clear as day.

In one of my poetry groups, there is a lovely man called Merle. Sometimes, one of us presents a poem we’ve written, and Merle will say, “Lose the last line or lose the last stanza”. Why? Because in the last line or the closing stanza, a poet may be tempted

to over-explain. By spelling everything out, the poet leaves nothing for the reader to do. But if readers can **find the meaning for themselves**, that is so much more satisfying, and the poem is also very much cooler.

A lesser poet might have drafted Psalm 19 and then added at the end, something like this:

*And just as the sun gives light and heat to everyone  
and is both understood and not understood,  
so the Law of God gives truth to everyone,  
and is both understood and not understood.*

Lose the last stanza! says Merle. Let the worshipper, let the listener make the connections.

So let us now make the connections. Part one is verses 1 - 6. Part two is verses 7 - 11. And then there's part three, a personal conclusion in verses 12 - 14, but we'll come to that in a bit.

As we seek to make the connections, we have a helper: the Holy Spirit. As I often remind people, the Bible only really becomes the Word of God when we connect it to our lives, our worlds. The Holy Spirit helps us to do that.

Let's have a look at what the first part says...

The heavens **worship**. They declare God's glory. They speak, and yet they have no words. They have no voice, yet their words reach the ends of the earth.

In some religious traditions, the heavens themselves may be worshipped. In biblical faith, the heavens, though resplendent, are mere signposts to the greater glory of God.

Making that much clear, we hear about the sun. The poet imagines that God has a tent for the sun to rest in during the night. Then we hear two similes to describe the sun:

- The sun is like a **bridegroom**: a beautiful lover!

- The sun is like a **champion** parading over his territory - a powerful presence.

Finally in this section, we are told that the sun's heat is offered to all that exists: it is a universal benefit offered unconditionally to all on the earth. (The poet knew nothing of the many dark days of the arctic winter.)

\* \* \*

Now let's see what the poet says about the law of the Lord. He uses synonyms here for the law so as to add some interest, and gives seven characteristics of the Law along with seven impacts on a person.

The Law is:

1. Perfect - it's complete; all you need
2. Trustworthy - you can most certainly rely on it
3. Right - describing moral behaviour
4. Pure - reflecting God's absolute commitment to truth and grace
5. Firm - solid, unchanging and true
6. Precious - the moral desire of a righteous person
7. Sweet - satisfying of spiritual hunger

The effect on the humble person is to:

1. **Refresh** the soul
2. Make simple people **wise**
3. Give light to the eyes, meaning, **help a person to find their way** through life
4. Give a **warning** when we are going astray
5. Bring **great reward** to those who follow the Law

We also learn that the Law is precious like gold and sweet like honey.

\* \* \*

So, having rather dismantled the two main parts of the poem, it's time now to consider how it works.

Since ancient times, the Hebrew people composed and sang Psalms. Some of the oldest we have are embedded in other Old Testament books, such as the Song of

the Sea in Exodus 15 or the Song of Hannah in 1 Samuel 2. Later, collections of songs were put together, and eventually, sometime between the establishing of the Jewish monarchy and the return from exile, the book of Psalms was brought together from these earlier collections. So the Psalter, in more or less its current form, was established between a thousand and three hundred years before Christ.

You can see evidence of that process of collecting within the text. Psalms are sometimes grouped as the *Psalms of Asaph* or the *Psalms of Korah*. Some Psalms are duplicated, just as we might find duplicates if we amalgamated a Methodist and Baptist hymn book. We are sometimes told that the Psalms of David have ended, only to find other Psalms ascribed to him later. And Psalms bearing a particular name, like David, may have been written imaginatively from his perspective rather than by him.

These two main parts of the Psalm are all about the way God speaks. God speaks through the wonders of creation, and God speaks through his Word.

This is a familiar idea. In Genesis 1, the closing sections of Job, Romans 1 and elsewhere, we learn that God speaks in all of creation; and the whole tenor of most biblical books is that God **speaks** in his word. Instead of repeating that, I want to develop another thought. Is Psalm 19 not an example of **poetic juxtaposition**?

In juxtaposition, two items are laid alongside each other, and the implied invitation is to compare and contrast the two items. A composer uses juxtaposition when a fast, lively movement leads into a slow, reflective one. The fast, lively movement colours the slow reflective one which follows it, and, in the listener's memory, the first movement is now moderated by listening to the second.

So here we have a rhythmically slower meditation on the sky, followed by a more pacy reflection on the word of God. What kind of things do you notice through your reflection on the interactions between the two?

The sun and the sky are beautiful and beneficial. And the law of the Lord is precious and sweet. The heavens bring glory to God... God's Law does this too; but it is implied rather than spelt out, by words like 'Pure'. We hear, too, that keeping the Law

brings great reward. Living God's way is its own benefit: the benefit of a quiet conscience, and the peace of living connections with all people of good will.

The heavens speak to the **whole created world**; by contrast the Law of the Lord speaks only to the human world, and to one small segment at that! But the contrast here gives us an **energy**, and a sense that the Word of God properly would speak to **all** the human world, and, through humans, foster the harmony of all creation.

The heavens speak **without words**! By contrast, the Law of God is made up of words. In this contrast we again feel something is being suggested about the Law of God... Yes, it is made of words, but it is not just a set of hundreds of thousands of words... The Word of God itself is something much deeper and more universal.

The Law of God does speak in words, yet it may also 'speak' underneath all words. Words can only get you so far; we have to sense the presence of the God whose words we read. Something of that is suggested in verse 9, where the 'fear of the Lord' is used as one of the synonyms for the Law of the Lord - this describes the proper respect for the majesty of the God who is speaking the words of the Law.

The sun is like a **bridegroom**: a beautiful lover! The Law of God is precious and sweet. I once had a Bible college lecturer who would ask us, after all our analysis, to **love** the text! Like a beloved bridegroom, the Law of God speaks, and our hearts respond in loving devotion.

The sun is like a **champion** parading over his territory; a powerful presence dominating life on earth. The law of God is firm and solid and brings warning to the earth's inhabitants. Again, by juxtaposition, we learn that the Law of God, whilst ignored by many, expresses the ultimate authority of God, and those who ignore him do so at their peril. The Law of God is not just some arcane text for a small religious minority. It is the measure of right behaviour for all humanity.

The sun's heat is a **universal benefit** offered unconditionally to all on the earth. In the same way, the benefits of God's word are offered to all of God's people. In the context, that meant all of the children of Israel. But the juxtaposition hints that, one day at least, the benefits of God's grace in giving his Law would be extended globally.

\* \* \*

In the light of all this we consider part three of the Psalm, verses 12 - 14. The worshipper is invited to consider how they personally might sit in view of this vision of God's Word.

Inspired by the poet, we would remember that we do not fully understand our own hearts, and may need God's forgiveness for actions which, seemingly good, are actually rooted in unworthy emotions such as arrogance or envy. As worshippers we desire that our whole selves, including our hidden selves, are subject to the all-embracing Word of God.

After dealing with their hidden errors, the worshipper is invited to acknowledge their wilful sins; things we have done which we know are against God's law. Nothing is hidden from the heat of the sun'; nothing is hidden from God's gaze. As Jesus says, the Father sees what we consider to be in secret.

Then comes the prayer I so often adapt as a prayer before preaching.

*May these words of my mouth and this meditation of my heart be pleasing in your sight, Lord, my Rock and my Redeemer.*

This is praying for a commitment of our selves - our inner thoughts and the words we speak - and by implication our actions - with that which pleases God.

But those who live by God's Law will find they themselves are pleased - at least their best selves will delight in living in line with God's word. Conversely, to hear God's word is to consider what pleases him.

Are you able to make pleasing God, rather than pleasing yourself, your primary aim in life?

\* \* \*

As Christians we declare that the Word became flesh and lived among us. Yes, we have the written word of the Bible. And yes, we have the physical word of the natural world. But most of all we have Jesus, the Word made flesh, through whom we receive grace upon grace. Like the sun, he is a champion, the victor over sin and

death, and all people are called to live his life of grace and truth. Like a bridegroom, his beauty provokes the love of our hearts, and all people who hear of him are moved by his teaching, grace, power, sacrifice and resurrection. Like sunlight warming the skin, he radiates the love of God to all who are humble enough to own his truth and rest in his grace.

Like a great rabbi, Jesus' words challenge everyone about the right way to live. Like a stunning mountain, his presence speaks to everyone about a grandeur, truth and beauty beyond all words.

We may not feel it sensible to situate our lives in the regulations given to a particular wandering race over three millennia ago. But we may just feel it is right to place ourselves in the heart of the Word made flesh, who always teaches us in words spoken and unspoken, of the right way to live. We seek to please him.

You may like to look into your own heart in the light of this message.

Sometimes we find ourselves resisting something in our lives. We may wonder whether it is good or bad. We may be both attracted to it and repelled by it.

For the believer, an answer always comes if we submit ourselves willingly and entirely to God's law, to his ways, to his Son... If we commit ourselves to pleasing him.

To situate ourselves in the centre of God's heart is the way to move forward.

Sometimes a path may seem a little dark, but if Christ draws us along it, we need never be afraid. The brighter path, without Christ, becomes the dark path.

Sometimes we may feel something is just too big an ask, but if it is Christ who asks us, then we can safely give.

Let him be like the sun to you, giving you warmth every day. Let him be like sunshine upon you, so that you know he will always be blessing you by drawing you to become a more whole person.

Don't bargain with him; don't offer him deals. Simply surrender to him and learn how to please him. If our aim is to live a life that pleases him, that will turn out to be a life

that brings out all that is beautiful and courageous, right and good in us, and ultimately will be a life that pleases the very best part of ourselves too.

Let's celebrate the God who speaks and saves as we sing, O Lord, my God, when I in awesome wonder...

Hymn (BPW 62) **O Lord, my God, when I in Awesome Wonder**

O Lord my God, when I in awesome wonder  
Consider all the works thy hands have made,  
I see the stars, I hear the mighty thunder,  
Thy power throughout the universe displayed;

*Chorus*

*Then sings my soul, my Saviour God, to thee,  
How great Thou art, How great Thou art!  
Then sings my soul, my Saviour God, to thee,  
How great Thou art, How great Thou art!*

When through the woods and forest glades I wander  
And hear the birds sing sweetly in the trees;  
When I look down from lofty mountain grandeur,  
And hear the brook, and feel the gentle breeze;

*Chorus*

And when I think that God his Son not sparing,  
Sent Him to die - I scarce can take it in,  
That on the cross my burden gladly bearing,  
He bled and died to take away my sin:

*Chorus*

When Christ shall come with shout of acclamation  
And take me home – what joy shall fill my heart!  
Then shall I bow in humble adoration  
And there proclaim, my God, how great thou art!



### *Chorus*

*Then sings my soul, my Saviour God, to thee,  
How great Thou art, How great Thou art!*

*Then sings my soul, my Saviour God, to thee,  
How great Thou art, How great Thou art!*

### 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.