



Heacham Parish Church

**Search for Heacham Parish Church on YouTube and you will find all songs and previous services.**

**Sunday Service 17<sup>th</sup> May 2020 Easter 6 Heacham Parish Church at Home**

Alleluia, Christ is risen.

**He is risen indeed, Alleluia.**

As we gather in our homes, together yet apart, we pray

Gracious God, we come before you,  
drawn by the power of your welcoming love.

We come with our sorrows and joys.

We come with our expectations and apprehensions.

We come with what we have done.

We come as who we are.

In your love we find peace and hope.

**Amen.**

Prayer of confession

God of love, we are sorry  
that at times our love for you falters;  
that we have wrong priorities;  
that we overlook your guidance.

O God, forgive us.

**O God, renew us.**

Loving Saviour, we are sorry

that we disobey your commandments;  
that we fail to love;  
that we walk by on the other side.

O God, forgive us.

**O God, renew us.**

Spirit of truth, we are sorry  
that we disregard your presence;  
that our thoughts and feelings are unrighteous;  
that we follow the world's way.

O God, forgive us.

**O God, renew us.**

May your presence abiding in us lead us in the right way,  
in the name of Jesus.

**Amen.**

**Song: Amazing Grace** played by Ross family

**Amazing Grace! how sweet the sound  
That saved a wretch like me;  
I once was lost, but now am found,  
Was blind, but now I see.**

**'Twas grace that taught my heart to fear,  
And grace my fears relieved;  
How precious did that grace appear,  
The hour I first believed!**

**Through many dangers, toils and snares  
I have already come;  
'Tis grace that brought me safe thus far,  
And grace will lead me home.**

**The Lord has promised good to me,  
His word my hope secures;  
He will my shield and portion be  
As long as life endures.**

**When we've been there a thousand years,  
Bright shining as the sun,  
We've no less days to sing God's praise  
Than when we first begun.**

**Bible Reading: Acts 17: 22-31** read by Judith Evans

**A Reflection from The Venerable Ian Bentley, the  
archdeacon of Lynn (who was due to be with us in  
Heacham today)**

It's good to be with you today and I hope that you and yours are well and keeping safe. The last time I preached in your church I knocked over the nativity scene so you will perhaps be glad that that I am safely contained in our house here in Sparham!

What Paul is saying in this dramatic scene from Acts is that God cannot be contained: not in temples, not in statues, not in human philosophies. He has been brought before the Council of the Areopagus to explain himself. So, standing outside the building, surrounded by the great and the good of Athens, with Temples and statues of the many gods worshipped in Athens and with the Parthenon in the background he lets them have it!

He starts graciously: he tells them what he has noticed: You are extremely religious he says, and I see because of the many altars and objects of worship here. Amongst them an altar 'to an unknown God'.

Paul then explains that all this is because God has placed in our very beings the desire to seek Him. *V 27, 28. 2 so that they would seek for God and perhaps reach for him and find him - though indeed he is not far from each one of us. 28 For "In him we live and move and have our being"; as even some of your own poets have said, He then goes on to say that our God is not unknown, he has made himself known in Jesus Christ. Our seeking after God is matched by him seeking us.*

We are outside our temples now.

Being outside our church buildings, stopping many of the activities that come with church life gives us the opportunity, like Paul, to notice things.

For instance, is our faith just religion? When 'all is stripped away' as the worship song goes, what is left of our faith? Is it possible that things we hold dear: our music, our liturgy, our buildings, and the things in them have sometimes become more important to us than the God to which they lead?

Wider than this, when we are confined to our homes and the whole superstructure of our lives is taken away from us, again, what is left? It gives opportunity for each of us to ask the questions: what are the priorities of my life? What is really important? When we take the baby steps out of lockdown, what things will we return to, what things will we not take up again?

One of the things we have noticed in this time is how more people are attending online services like this than attend church normally. More people, the media tell us, are praying. Perhaps unsurprising in a time of national emergency, but interesting all the same. When Paul says 'In him we live and move and have our being' he speaks into our situation. I believe that every man, woman, girl, and boy have the spark of God within them.

Otherwise the creation narrative makes no sense. God breathes life into Adam and the word 'breath' is the same as Spirit. Ruach in the Hebrew. Paul repeats it in v 25: *he himself gives to all people life and breath and all things.*

The Spirit of God within each human being.

I have no idea who is joining us for worship now. In fact, I have no idea if you've nipped out for a coffee! But whether you are a regular churchgoer or a visitor, a Christian or simply curious, you are probably responding to that breath of God, that spark of God within you.

The people of Athens had a multiplicity of gods, idols, objects that they worshipped. In responding to that quest for the divine within them they followed a path of lockdown: this is my god - this is what I worship. This is my altar where I sacrifice to placate the god who may harm me. My god lives in this building.

All part of your quest, says Paul, but not necessary.

The one true God cannot be contained. He cannot be created by people because he is the creator.

He has put that desire to reach out for the divine in you and what's more he reaches out to you. He has done that specifically by being born in human form, Jesus Christ. He has reached into our humanity and has lived and died and lived again to show that there is abundant life for us now and for all eternity.

You can know that now, where you are. He reaches out in love and simply asks that you turn to him.

**Music: Spirit of Living God** played by Shona Waters

**Prayers of intercession** written by Sue Spencer

Loving God, we have come to you this morning in song, expressing our joy and gratitude for all that you have done and for all that you have given, we come to you now in prayer.

God of all hope we call on you today, as we pray for those of us who are living with fear, fear of illness, fear for loved ones, fear for the future. Reach out to all whom the future seems uncertain or unwelcome, and bring the assurance that even in the darkest moments, the greatest challenges, the most worrying times you are there able to bring light out of darkness, hope out of fear and good out of evil. We ask that you will give us your peace and shine your light on us all.

**Lord in your mercy, Hear our prayer.**

Loving God, we pray for your church and our village in this time of uncertainty, we give thanks to you for the unity that we have discovered at this troubled time, for the experiences we are discovering, for the care we have been able to show and the care that we have in turn received and lastly for the bond that is being forged. We ask that our new friendships that have been made in this village, will continue and that they will flourish.

**Lord in your mercy, Hear our prayer.**

Loving God, there is a time to weep and a time to laugh, a time to be solemn and a time for humour. In these difficult times teach us to appreciate your gift of laughter and to share it with those around us.

**Merciful Father accept our prayers for the sake of your Son, our Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen**

**Let us all now join in the Lord's prayer.**

## **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. **Amen**

Go in the peace of Christ. Alleluia, alleluia.

**Thanks be to God. Alleluia, alleluia.**

## **For those without access to the internet:**

A new telephone worship service: **Daily Hope**, offers music, prayers and reflections as well as full worship services from the Church of England at the end of a telephone line.

The line – which is available 24 hours a day on **0800 804 8044** – has been set up particularly with those unable to join online church services during the period of restrictions in mind. This is a freephone service.

Also The Diocesan weekly podcast **Sunday Hope** can be listened to via your phone by calling **01603 537577**- calls for this are charged at a local rate.

**Also Zoom Church, Drinks, Nibbles and Chat will be in the evening next week Wednesday at 7pm. Veronica will send an email...respond if you would like to come.**

