

**Circuit Service, Sunday 3rd January 2021
Farnworth and Worsley Circuit**



Welcome and Call to Worship:

Good morning everyone, and a very happy new year! I hope and pray that this year will be filled with lots of good things, blessings, love and joy.

William Sangster, a Methodist minister from a previous age wrote this at the start of a new year. "I cannot promise you, in the coming year, a new set of circumstances. Indeed, I anticipate, for myself and for you, difficulties and disappointments and obstacles and some pain - for that is life... but if you submit to his lordship, you can have a new heart, a new life, and therefore, a new birth."

Encouraging words. Whatever this new year brings, new opportunities, new potential, even new beards...we can be sure that God is with us.

And now a prayer. Loving God, fill our expectant hearts as we stand on this threshold of a new year. May we discover you afresh each and every day of this year.

Hymn:

Joy to the world, the Lord is come!
Let earth receive her King;
let every heart prepare him room,
and heaven and nature sing,
and heaven and nature sing,
and heaven, and heaven and nature sing.

Joy to the world, the Saviour reigns!
Let all their songs employ;
while fields and floods, rocks, hills and plains
repeat the sounding joy,
repeat the sounding joy,
repeat, repeat the sounding joy.

He rules the world with truth and grace,
and makes the nations prove
the glories of his righteousness
and wonders of his love,
and wonders of his love,
and wonders, wonders of his love.

Isaac Watts (1674–1748)

Prayers of Praise and Confession:

Gracious, amazing, almighty God,
majestic, divine, eternal.
We often struggle to find the right words to describe everything you mean to us -
thank you that through Jesus you have given us a glimpse of your glory and your unfailing, undeserved, unconditional love and grace, lavished upon us.
Thank you that we are part of your planned family, young and old.
Thank you for the happy times of joy and laughter.
In the darkest moments, particularly over the last challenging year when life was tough for so many,
in the grief, sadness, anxiety, disappointments, pain - thank you for walking alongside us.
When it was difficult to find words to pray and we sometimes felt far away from you –
thank you for being there, loving us.
Thank you for your tender, patient, precious closeness.
Thank for the dedicated care of others, and those who carry us in their prayers.

Thank you that in this time of ongoing lockdown and restrictions, we can share together, welcomed as your family in worship and praise, united in love and spirit.

Lord God, we know that we are so unworthy of your love. We let you down in our silent thoughts, in our spoken words, and in our actions.

In the quietness we ask you to forgive us....

Touch each one of us with your healing forgiveness, so that we may truly love you, and faithfully serve you.

Thank you for a new start at the beginning of this New Year, and the beauty of each season.

May we each look forward with assurance that the cold of winter will be followed by hope and optimism for tomorrow and renewal in spring.

Let us remember that you, awesome and timeless God, do new things in and through us, in church, and the world.

You can transform every situation with your extravagant love.

Amen

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.

Hymn:

Before the world began,
one Word was there;
grounded in God he was,
rooted in care;
by him all things were made,
in him was love displayed,
through him God spoke, and said,
'I am for you.'

Life found in him its source,
death found its end;
light found in him its course,
darkness its friend.

For neither death nor doubt
nor darkness can put out
the glow of God, the shout,
'I am for you.'

The Word was in the world
which from him came;
unrecognised he was,
unknown by name;
one with all humankind,
with the unloved aligned,
convincing sight and mind,
'I am for you.'

All who received the Word
by God were blessed ;
sisters and brothers they
of earth's fond guest.
So did the Word of grace
proclaim in time and space
and with a human face,
'I am for you.'

John L. Bell (b.1949) and Graham Maule (b.1958)

Reading: Jeremiah 31: 7-14 (NRSV)

For thus says the LORD:

Sing aloud with gladness for Jacob,
and raise shouts for the chief of the nations;
proclaim, give praise, and say,
“Save, O LORD, your people,
the remnant of Israel.”

See, I am going to bring them from the land of the north,
and gather them from the farthest parts of the earth,
among them the blind and the lame,
those with child and those in labour, together;
a great company, they shall return here.

With weeping they shall come,
and with consolations I will lead them back,
I will let them walk by brooks of water,
in a straight path in which they shall not stumble;
for I have become a father to Israel,
and Ephraim is my firstborn.

Hear the word of the LORD, O nations,
and declare it in the coastlands far away;
say, “He who scattered Israel will gather him,
and will keep him as a shepherd a flock.”

For the LORD has ransomed Jacob,
and has redeemed him from hands too strong for him.

They shall come and sing aloud on the height of Zion,
and they shall be radiant over the goodness of the LORD,
over the grain, the wine, and the oil,
and over the young of the flock and the herd;
their life shall become like a watered garden,
and they shall never languish again.

Then shall the young women rejoice in the dance,
and the young men and the old shall be merry.

I will turn their mourning into joy,
I will comfort them, and give them gladness for sorrow.

I will give the priests their fill of fatness,
and my people shall be satisfied with my bounty,
says the LORD.

Reading: John 1: 1-18 (NRSV)

The Word Became Flesh

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.

There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light. The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world. He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him. He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him. But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God.

And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth. (John testified to him and cried out, “This was he of whom I said, ‘He who comes after me ranks ahead of me because he was before me.’”) From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. The law indeed was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God. It is God the only Son, who is close to the Father's heart, who has made him known.

Hymn:

Love came down at Christmas,
Love all lovely, Love divine;
Love was born at Christmas,
star and angels gave the sign.

Worship we the Godhead,
Love incarnate, Love divine;
worship we our Jesus:
but wherewith for sacred sign?

Love shall be our token,
love be yours and love be mine,
love to God and all the world,
love for plea and gift and sign.

Christina Georgina Rossetti (1830–1894)

Reflection: Rev. Darren Garfield

I woke up to the news that the Oxford AstraZeneca vaccine had been approved for use across the UK. The second vaccine against Covid-19 with the first doses hoping to be given on Monday. If you were to combine this with the Pfizer jab there would be enough to cover the whole population. The initial dose of the Oxford vaccine would provide some degree of immunity, which would be hugely strengthened by the second dose, given around three months later.

In more poetic terms, if you like, and a phrase used many times now, it is injecting hope into the arms of millions of people.

As I write this we live under the shadow of Covid-19, that shadow made larger by the knowledge that millions more people have been placed into the toughest tier four restrictions. As if the restrictions weren't tough anyway, now they have increased and there are further constraints and limitations to what we can or can't do.

This is the life we have been engaged in this last year, a mixture of hope – yes, the vaccine potentially opens up a whole new world, or for some a return to an old world where we could mix and meet and hug and hold. Hope. But hope tinged with a need to be careful for some time yet to come.

And of course there is a third way, the new normal, which many are embracing, which is about learning from our experience with that deep desire to carry on doing some, maybe not all, but some of the things we have been doing these last nine months.

Hope is at the heart of our readings today. Hope because it is still Christmas. Yes, let's shout it from the rooftops if we can, Christmas didn't end on Christmas Day...that is when it started! And we've still some days to go yet! It's not yet Epiphany. Hold your horses, don't pack away your Christmas trees just yet, or at least hold on to those five lit candles! We are in the Christmas season still, and we are in the season of hope, the hope contained within the child in the manger, the hope encompassed in the message of angels and the 'Yes' of Mary. Hope captured in the lives of shepherds and the gifts of magi.

Hope is at the heart of new year, of any new year. And if we could bottle that hope, that sense of eager expectation, and keep it forever, we would, I'm sure!

What gives us more hope, I wonder, than the incredible, mind-boggling love of God for God's extravagant, generous gift of Jesus Christ?!

What gives us more hope, I wonder, than God overturning the sorrow, the mourning, the weeping, the exile of the people of Israel?

Both our readings speak to our situation, because they speak of hope.

In Jeremiah, there is the exile of the people of Israel. Exile, a simple word, but it speaks of being separated, banished, outcast. In our world we would think of asylum seekers, or refugees – not a perfect

analogy, but still giving us a sense that their exile was no holiday. For with it came defeat, and a sense of being abandoned. This was no party; this was total despair.

And into that despair God offered an invitation, a way through, a new hope. Yes, God will bring them back, God will gather them. They will walk by brooks of water. They will not stumble. For, God says, I am a parent, a father, a shepherd. They will rejoice they will sing; they will be radiant; they will be like a watered garden. They will be glad; they will be filled with joy!

And it's personal! God, in the first person! I will do this, says God. I will bring and gather and lead. I will let them walk!

So you have this lovely image of the people of Israel heading home, bruised and broken, but heading home, nonetheless, led by a personal, present, close God.

How do you feel in this moment, I wonder? Do you feel radiant, or like a watered garden? Or do you feel a bit bruised and broken, inside or outside?

Then hold on, with your fingernails if you have to, to that image of the shepherd who values every sheep. Hold on to that image of that watered garden, knowing that it is God who holds the watering can. Hold on to that sense of radiance. Some translations say, their faces will shine with happiness.

This is a hope based not on a vague notion, but on the deep-down reality that is God. Yes, I want to feel like a watered garden. Yes, I want to feel radiant. Yes, I want to head for home!

And more than anything I want to experience life as verse 13 describes it: "Then shall the young women rejoice in the dance, and the young men and the old shall be merry." Or to put it another way, youngsters can have their loud parties, and older people can join in, and no one will mind. No one will tell the police about them.

This isn't just a vision of a return to Israel; it is a vision of a post-Covid world! I might not bother with the dancing, but I'll certainly be up for a party!

It is the opposite of exile, with all the dread and dreariness that suggests. Because those in exile so often feel that there is no hope, that there is nothing new, no new possibilities. Not true, says God. Because it is through the power and love and faithfulness of God that new life truly begins.

John knew all about hope, and he described it in terms of Word and Life and Light. Life found in the Word and a light that can never be put out, certainly not by the darkness that neither understands it nor can extinguish it. I'm not sure if I like the stark distinction between darkness and light, as if darkness is all bad! Especially when the Psalmist backs me up! Darkness is not dark to You, but the night shines like the day, for darkness is as light to You.

But that's another sermon for another day! What this reading says to me is that we live in a world that is suffused by light. We live in a world illuminated by light. The light shines in the darkness. As the poet Gerard Manley Hopkins put it, and which I can still remember from my 6th form at Hodge Hill Comp:

*The world is charged with the grandeur of God.
It will flame out, like shining from shook foil;*

That's a pretty good description of God to me!

What we have to do is walk in the light, trust the light, believe in the light and in doing so, as John describes it a bit later, we become children of light. The light pushes back the darkness and nothing, in all the world can put out the light. For the Word became flesh. God's down to earth love. That Word, which is life-giving, gives life to everyone. That Word lights up the world and nothing, neither despair, nor fear, not even crucifixion, can extinguish it.

Choose life, choose light, choose hope. Choose the shepherd, choose the gardener, choose God! Amen.

Hymn:

Darkness like a shroud covers the earth.
Evil like a cloud covers the people.
But the Lord will rise upon you
and his glory will appear on you,
nations will come to your light.

*Arise, shine, your light has come,
the glory of the Lord has risen on you!
Arise, shine, your light has come,
Jesus the Light of the world has come.*

Children of the light, be clean and pure.
Rise, you sleepers, Christ will shine on you.
Take the Spirit's flashing two-edged sword
and with faith declare God's mighty word;
stand up and in his strength be strong.

Arise, shine, your light has come, ...

Here among us now, Christ the Light
kindles brighter flames in our trembling hearts.
Living Word, our lamp, come guide our feet
as we walk as one in light and peace
till justice and truth shine like the sun.

Arise, shine, your light has come, ...

Like a city bright so let us blaze;
lights in every street turning night to day.
And the darkness shall not overcome
till the fullness of Christ's kingdom comes,
dawning to God's eternal day.

*Arise, shine, your light has come,
the glory of the Lord has risen on you!
Arise, shine, your light has come,
Jesus the Light of the world,
Jesus the Light of the world,
Jesus the Light of the world has come.*

Graham Kendrick (b.1950)

Prayers for others and for the world:

Good Morning and a happy new year, welcome to our prayers of intercession.

I wonder how many of you have made New Year's resolutions? Whether that is to eat healthier, do more exercise, or perhaps a promise to yourself to learn something new or to change in some way. My promise to myself this new year is to have more confidence, believe in myself more, however whether or not we have made any New Year's resolutions, I'm sure each and everyone of us hopes to return to some kind of normality and, for there to be an end to this pandemic. This terrible pandemic that has affected so many of us, I myself have been self-isolating since Boxing Day after finding out that my son tested positive for COVID-19 despite following all precautions and guidelines. My son and I met on Christmas Day in our family bubble. My son is one of the lucky ones, he's healthy and has had few symptoms, as are my sister and brother-in-law who also overcame COVID-19 recently. However, lots of people aren't so lucky, many have lost their lives, for their family's life will never again return to normal.

I work in Palliative Care and also in Mental Health and, I've seen first-hand the effects COVID-19 has had on people. As we begin our prayers of intercession I would like us to remember them, let us pray.

Lord we pray for those we know who struggle with Mental illnesses, anxiety and depression, we pray that there will be resources released to help enough staff employed and, finances given towards Mental Health services nationally. Help us to be a friend and a listening ear to those who suffer, fill us with compassion and wisdom. Ultimately we pray for those who wrestle with sorrow, that they may know your victory over those dark thoughts which currently seem to triumph.

We pray for those who might be considered fallen by those around them, may they know your restoration and grace. Help us not to judge or exclude your beloved children, but instead lift them up in prayer and embrace them with the grace we know in Christ.

We pray for all those in hospital separated from their loved ones, unable to have visits. We particularly remember Chris Brown and the reverend Pat Brown and their family at this time and, we also pray for all those who are unwell at home, unable to have visits from their loved ones, and for all those who are alone and lonely. Thank you loving Father for hearing our prayers.

We conclude with a prayer offered to myself by a friend when I myself was struggling:
Calm me Lord as you calmed the storm, still me Lord keep me from harm, let all the tumult within me cease, enfold me Lord in your peace.

Amen.

Offering:

(For those who are setting aside their offering each week this prayer may be said:)

Loving God, for all you have given to me, I thank you.
I offer these gifts to you, in gratitude for your generous love.
In the name of Christ, I pray.

Amen

Hymn:

Lord, for the years your love has kept and guided,
urged and inspired us, cheered us on our way,
sought us and saved us, pardoned and provided,
Lord of the years, we bring our thanks today.

Lord, for that word, the Word of life which fires us,
speaks to our hearts and sets our souls ablaze,
teaches and trains, rebukes us and inspires us,
Lord of the word, receive your people's praise.

Lord, for our land, in this our generation,
spirits oppressed by pleasure, wealth and care;
for young and old, for commonwealth and nation,
Lord of our land, be pleased to hear our prayer.

Lord, for our world; when we disown and doubt him,
loveless in strength, and comfortless in pain;
hungry and helpless, lost indeed without him,
Lord of the world, we pray that Christ may reign.

Lord, for ourselves; in living power remake us,
self on the cross and Christ upon the throne;
past put behind us, for the future take us,
Lord of our lives, to live for Christ alone.

Timothy Dudley-Smith (b.1926)

Blessing:

Lord,
Lead us on, to learn willingly, to love well to live in trust.
Surround us with hope, shield us from harm, set us on our way
rejoicing.
And we say together...
The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with us all.

Amen.

After Service Telephone Chat:

Sunday 3rd January 11:45 AM

Telephone Number: 0333 011 0616

Access code: 623 5908

Please note the call asks you to press the '£' key after entering the access code. You can either press the '#' key, or just wait, and you will be connected to the telephone chat.

After Service Zoom Chat:

Sunday 3rd January from 11:45 AM

[https://us02web.zoom.us/j/2172687931?
pwd=aHVOb1VsUnE1SlI3OSTSaFRDQnVaQT09](https://us02web.zoom.us/j/2172687931?pwd=aHVOb1VsUnE1SlI3OSTSaFRDQnVaQT09)

Meeting ID: 217 268 7931

Passcode: RevDazzer

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