

2nd January 2022 – Morning Service

God of second chances

Rev Alan Combes

Call to Worship

We gather in the early new year to give thanks to God for seeing us safely through the past year, to celebrate and praise God for the saving acts of God in our lives throughout history and to honour God. We also come to honour the legacy of those who have gone before us such that that we may be here today. We remember that in some parts of the world today and at many times in history our predecessors in faith have faced prejudice, oppression and injustice, that we might express our faith in freedom. At the dawn of a new year we join with that "great cloud of witnesses, seen and unseen" in song, dance, testimony, praise, and prayer, as we welcome with both hands the opportunity to return to God. For the greatest thing about being a Christian is that we can have a new beginning.

So we come in prayer and ask God to prepare us, that we might receive the Holy Spirit. For our God is an awesome God - the source and giver of all life. Amen

StF 354 – Jesus is the name we honour

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| 1) Jesus is the name we honour;
Jesus is the name we praise.
Majestic name above all other names,
The highest heaven and earth proclaim
That Jesus is our God. | 2) Jesus is the name we worship;
Jesus is the name we trust.
He is the King above all other kings,
Let all creation stand and sing
That Jesus is our God. |
| <i>Ch) We will glorify, we will lift Him high,
We will give Him honour and praise.
We will glorify, we will lift Him high,
We will give Him honour and praise.</i> | 3) Jesus is the Father's splendour;
Jesus is the Father's joy.
He will return to reign in majesty,
And every eye at last will see
That Jesus is our God. |

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Psalm 8

O Lord, our Sovereign, how majestic is your name in all the earth!

You have set your glory above the heavens.

Out of the mouths of babes and infants you have founded a bulwark because of your foes,
to silence the enemy and the avenger.

When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars that you have established;
what are human beings that you are mindful of them, mortals that you care for them?

Yet you have made them a little lower than God, and crowned them with glory and honour.

You have given them dominion over the works of your hands; you have put all things under their feet,

all sheep and oxen, and also the beasts of the field,

the birds of the air, and the fish of the sea, whatever passes along the paths of the seas.

O Lord, our Sovereign, how majestic is your name in all the earth!

Opening prayer

O God, distant yet near, we gather as witnesses to your promises that if we seek you with all our hearts, we will find you. Be among us this day. Hear the confessions of our mouths and the yearnings of our hearts. Help us change the narrowness of our vision and the pettiness of our living. Make us new again with your holy grace. Grant us the maturity to accept your many gifts in humility and to use them with faithfulness. Grant to us your spirit that our worship may have integrity and energy, ever witnessing to your holy presence in our lives. We praise and give thanks to you, Eternal Presence; through Jesus Christ we pray. **Amen**

StF 405 – Great is the darkness

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| 1) Great is the darkness that covers the earth,
Oppression, injustice and pain.
Nations are slipping in hopeless despair,
Though many have come in Your name.
Watching while sanity dies,
Touched by the madness and lies. | 2) May now Your church rise with power and love,
This glorious gospel proclaim,
In every nation salvation will come
To those who believe in Your name.
Help us bring light to this world,
That we might speed Your return. |
| Ch) <i>Come Lord Jesus,
Come Lord Jesus,
Pour out Your Spirit we pray.
Come Lord Jesus,
Come Lord Jesus,
Pour out Your Spirit on us today.</i> | 3) Great celebrations on that final day,
When out of the heavens You come.
Darkness will vanish, all sorrows will end,
And rulers will bow at Your throne.
Our great commission complete,
Then face to face we shall meet. |

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Time of personal reflection

If you are on your own reading this service – take a moment to look back at the past year, see where God has been with you and give thanks. If this is being used as part of a local arrangement why not invite people to stand and give a word of testimony / thanksgiving for the presence and sustaining blessing God has offered over the past year.

Reading: Gen 12:1-2

The Lord had said to Abram, ‘Go from your country, your people and your father’s household to the land I will show you. I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing.’

Reading: Acts 9:1-6

Meanwhile, Saul was still breathing out murderous threats against the Lord’s disciples. He went to the high priest and asked him for letters to the synagogues in Damascus, so that if he found any there who belonged to the Way, whether men or women, he might take them as prisoners to Jerusalem.

As he neared Damascus on his journey, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, ‘Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?’

‘Who are you, Lord?’ Saul asked. ‘I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting,’ he replied. ‘Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do.’

Reading: John 21:1, 15-17

Afterwards Jesus appeared again to his disciples, by the Sea of Galilee. When they had finished eating, Jesus said to Simon Peter, 'Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?' 'Yes, Lord,' he said, 'you know that I love you.' Jesus said, 'Feed my lambs.'

Again Jesus said, 'Simon son of John, do you love me?' He answered, 'Yes, Lord, you know that I love you.' Jesus said, 'Take care of my sheep.'

The third time he said to him, 'Simon son of John, do you love me?' Peter was hurt because Jesus asked him the third time, 'Do you love me?' He said, 'Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you.' Jesus said, 'Feed my sheep.'

A New Year reflection – God of second chances

As we begin the new year, we make our New Year's resolutions - a chance to have another go at something which perhaps we struggled with in the past? In a sense, New Year is about second chances! And I'm a great believer that God is a God of second chances! Indeed perhaps that is what the cross is all about?

I was first called to preaching in my teenage years and I started on the old local preaching program but along the way the pressures of other church activities – all good and important things like youth work and music – meant that I drifted from my calling. It's took the arrival of a new minister to sit me down one day and ask what was going on? God was giving me a second chance...

Our journey starts back in the old Testament with Abram and Sarai in Ur, where Abraham spent most of his life in Canaan as a livestock owner. They were both advanced in years and they were both far from perfect. And yet God promises to make Abram into a great nation and that he will be a blessing to others. But when they go to Egypt Abram is afraid and he presents Sarai as his sister. He forgets God's promise of protection and stops trusting God. At the same time Sarai doesn't believe God's promise that she will have a child and so offers her maid servant Hagar to Abram instead. Despite all of this God still grants them a son.

Meanwhile we have Paul, the great teacher and theologian upon whom rests the very heart of our theological understanding and as well as much of the shape of the church's understanding of faith. And yet we sometimes forget that we are first introduced to him in Acts 9 as a religious Pharisee, persecuting Christians without mercy, a zealous, murderous enemy of the faithful. It's difficult to imagine a more unlikely choice and yet God calls him and gives him a second chance.

And finally we have Peter – the rock, the leader, the one who saw who Jesus was and is, the powerhouse of faith and mission in the birth of early church, the voice of love for God in Jesus. But we all know the story of his denial and who could blame him, we cannot judge him when his real life was on the line. And yet Jesus meets with him and instead of berating him for not being strong enough or faithful enough, Jesus simply calls him again to feed his sheep.

Three central figures in the Bible narrative – one too old, one too evil and the other too weak. And yet God saw inside them, God saw beyond their weakness and God saw the great things they could do.

As we begin a new year we have a unique opportunity to reflect on ourselves, our lives and our relationship with God. I don't know where you are with God but that's ok! God only ever asks one thing of us especially at a time like this – that we might turn back to God who always offers us a second chance!

StF 338 – There is a redeemer

1) There is a Redeemer,
Jesus, God's own Son.
Precious Lamb of God, Messiah,
Holy One.

2) Jesus my Redeemer,
Name above all names,
Precious Lamb of God, Messiah,
O for sinners slain.

*Ch) Thank You, O my Father,
For giving us Your Son,
And leaving Your Spirit till
The work on earth is done.*

3) When I stand in glory
I will see His face,
And there I'll serve my King for ever
In that holy place.

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Offering

Wherever you are, take a moment in quiet prayer to offer yourself and your life back to God.

Confessing and Praying for the Year to Come

Dear God - thank you that you make all things new. Thank you for being present with us in our lives this past year, sharing the good along with the hard times. Break down our pride and reminded us how much we need you and rely on your presence every single day. Forgive us for those times we have taken you for granted – Creator God, Saving Son and Enabling Spirit. Thank you that in Jesus name we may be forgiven and made right with you.

We pray for your Spirit to lead us each step of this New Year. We ask that you will guide our decisions and turn our hearts to desire you above all else. We ask that you will open doors that need to be opened and close the ones that need to be shut. We ask that you would help us release our grip on trying to control things ourselves. We ask for help to pursue you first, above our own dreams and desires.

We ask for your wisdom, for your strength and power to be present within us. We pray you will make us strong and courageous for the road ahead. Grant us abilities beyond what we feel able to achieve, let your fruits grow in us and your gifts flow freely through us, so that you will be honoured by our lives, and through us others may be drawn to you.

We pray that you will keep us far from the snares and traps of temptation. That you will whisper in our ear when we need to run, and whisper in our heart when we need to stand our ground.

Lord - we pray for your protection over our families and friends. We ask for your hand to cover us and keep us from our own weaknesses and the temptations of this world; surround us, that we will be safe in your hands and be present with us when trouble comes. Grant us discernment and insight beyond our years, to understand your will, to hear your voice, and to know your ways.

May we be known as great givers, help us to be generous and kind, help us to look to the needs of others and not be consumed by only our own. May we be lovers of truth and may your light shine in us, through us, over us. May we make a difference in this world, for your glory and purposes. Set you way before us that we may reflect your peace and hope to a world that so desperately needs your presence and healing. To you be glory and honour this New Year, and forever. In Jesus' name, **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.**

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.
Save us from the time of trial
and deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are
yours now and for ever. **Amen.**

Song – God sent his Son

1) God sent His Son, they called Him Jesus;
He came to love, heal and forgive.
He lived and died, to buy my pardon.
An empty grave is there to prove
My Saviour lives!

2) How sweet to hold our new-born baby
And feel the pride and joy he gives;
But greater still the calm assurance,
This child can face uncertain days
Because He lives!

*Ch) Because He lives, I can face tomorrow.
Because He lives, all fear is gone;
Because I know He holds the future,
And life is worth the living,
Just because He lives!*

3) And then one day I'll cross that river,
I'll fight life's final war with pain.
And then as death gives way to vict'ry,
I'll see the lights of glory
And I'll know He reigns.

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Blessing

God has done a good and new thing! Immanuel.
Our mission is to the world. Let us go forth boldly to proclaim the good news that is Jesus Christ;
Christ has died, Christ is risen, Christ will come again. **Amen and Amen.**