

Sunday January 15th
A service of worship for use at home
Prepared by Rev David Speed
Covenant Service

Many of us are aware of the term, 'Covenant'. The Methodist Covenant Service reminds us of our relationship with God. God shows His Love to us, and we make promises to Him. Please join in the words in heavy black type.

Call to Worship - Your voice calms our fears
Your hug dries our tears
Your music is our refrain
Help us to sing your song again

Hymn - StF 66 Great is thy faithfulness

Great is Thy faithfulness, O God my Father
There is no shadow of turning with Thee
Thou changest not, Thy compassions, they
fail not
As Thou hast been, Thou forever will be

Great is Thy faithfulness
Great is Thy faithfulness
Morning by morning new mercies I see
All I have needed Thy hand hath provided
Great is Thy faithfulness, Lord, unto me

Summer and winter and springtime and
harvest
Sun, moon and stars in their courses above
Join with all nature in manifold witness
To Thy great faithfulness, mercy and love
Great is Thy faithfulness...

Pardon for sin and a peace that endureth
Thine own dear presence to cheer and to
guide
Strength for today and bright hope for
tomorrow
Blessings all mine with 10,000 beside
Great is Thy faithfulness...

Prayer Let us pray,

We adore you, God. You are Our Lord, who looks after us with a love that never ends. We give thanks for Jesus Christ, who, though he had everything, gave it up for us. He was tempted as we are, but never gave way. He went about doing good, preaching your wishes as you would wish. He was obedient even to death on a Cross, but is now alive and has opened the doorway to you, and to all who will believe in Him. He will come again to be our Judge. We share gladly in God's Spirit. His wisdom confirms us. His power enables us.

He will do for us far more than we ask or think.

Blessèd be God for ever.

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.*

Silence

In the silence, we admit that, for whatever reasons, we do not always live our best lives. We ask for your help.

Confession

Lord, if we are not all that we would like to be, we are not that we should be. We have been so very slow to learn about and from Jesus, to follow Him, and to carry our crosses.

Lord, forgive us.

Lord, our worship has not always given you the praise you deserve, nor have we come together enough to draw strength from you, or taken the opportunities that we might to meet around your table at Communion. We have been slow to stand up for Jesus.

Father, forgive us.

Lord, we have not always used your gifts or looked after your world well. Sometimes, we have been too quick to condemn what is done against us but too tolerant of injustice suffered by someone else. We have sometimes wanted to keep your love for ourselves rather than sharing it.

Father, forgive us.

If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just, and will forgive our sins and cleanse us from unrighteousness.

AMEN. Thanks be to God.

Hymn - StF 250 Jesus calls us o'er the tumult

Jesus calls us o'er the tumult
of our life's wild, restless sea;
day by day his voice invites me,
saying "Christian, follow me!"

As the first disciples heard it
by the Galilean lake,
turned from home and toil and kindred,
leaving all for his dear sake.

Jesus calls us from the worship
of the vain world's golden store,
from each idol that would keep us,
saying "Christian, love me more."

In our joys and in our sorrows,
days of toil and hours of ease,
still he calls, in cares and pleasures,
"Christian, love me more than these."

Jesus calls us! In your mercy,
Saviour, help us hear your call;
give our hearts to your obedience,
serve and love you best of all!

Reading - John 1:29-34 (NIV)

John Testifies About Jesus

²⁹The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world! ³⁰This is the one I meant when I said, 'A man who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me.' ³¹I myself did not know him, but the reason I came baptizing with water was that he might be revealed to Israel."

³²Then John gave this testimony: "I saw the Spirit come down from heaven as a dove and remain on him. ³³And I myself did not know him, but the one who sent me to baptize with water told me, 'The man on whom you see the Spirit come down and remain is the one who will baptize with the Holy Spirit.' ³⁴I have seen and I testify that this is God's Chosen One."^[1]

Sermon

BEHOLD THE LAMB OF GOD WHO TAKES AWAY THE SINS OF THE WORLD

One of the mottos at this time of the year is 'New Year, New Start'. Now, we need to go to the person who can give us that new start. I think that John is saying that Jesus offers that new start. He is the one to do so.

"Behold the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world". Jesus offers us a new start. Jesus offers others a new start.

Jesus offers us a new start.

He takes away the guilt. I have a sad tale to tell. Someone gave me a book token for Christmas. That's not the sad tale, though Anne, my wife, might have thought so, as she says, "Oh, no, not another book. No, the sad tale is that my present giver bought me a book

token for Christmas, and then lost it. She has looked everywhere in drawers, got other people to whom she's sent presents to look, looked in the recycling bin, but no, she can't find it. I said to her, "Don't beat yourself up over it". Admittedly, the Solicitor's letter will come in the morning, but don't beat yourself up over it".

We do tend to beat ourselves up over things, feel guilty, about things we can do nothing about now. Maybe, we did something wrong, but we don't have to go on about it. We may regret it, but John is certainly saying, "Jesus takes the guilt out of regret."

I won't mention how there's a reference to sacrificial lamb sent out onto the wilderness as an outward sign of wanting to be rid of those wrong attitudes that have led to wrong actions. I need not mention that John seems to be referring to what Jesus did on the Cross to rescue us from the consequences of these bad attitudes. Nor need I say that the Lamb of God may refer to the servant of God who has God's power to overcome all that can destroy us.

These are all pictures that simply state that Jesus gets rid of those wrong attitudes we call sin that are present in us all when we let Him. They state that he does so, rather than how he does so.

We tend to say, unless I know how he does it, how can I believe it? Yet we need to know that we can be different. All these pictures are meant to show that He is the one to believe in, to give us courage to believe that we can be different.

We visited some friends recently and as we were going to see them saw a shop which said, "Second Chance Charity Shop". Jesus' goodness, Jesus' love, Jesus' charity offers us all a second chance.

John challenges us not to concentrate on what we have done but on who He is, the Special One of God, who sacrifices himself on the Cross for truth and goodness, shows that his power is greater than what threatens or destroys, and gets us to believe in ourselves because we believe in Him.

Of course, we have to admit our mistakes. Someone once found one of the files of the ex-Secretary of State in the US Government, Henry Kissinger. It was entitled, "Mistakes". He opened it, "It was empty". We know that none of us have files that can claim that, sometimes we want to give the impression that we have, but when we admit our mistakes, we need not be poleaxed, we need not beat ourselves up, because we know that God's own Special One, Jesus, loved us enough to give up even his life for us. In the end, that is more important than that guilt which has dragged us down so much. He offers us a new start, with new power, His power, in and with us.

What He does for us, He does for others.

It's something we say to our society.

It says he takes away the sins of the world. The sins of others. Others have a second chance. This is why we who feel we meet on the side streets of life have something to say to the rest of our society. We are crucial, our message is crucial. We do not depend on someone else's approval because this is true, "Everyone can have a second chance".

In a world where often people discount and shame others and allow them no way back because of what they have done, we picture Jesus, and we say, "There is always a second chance". Because of the way they convicted so many members of King Richard II's court of

treason, most of them were executed. the 1388 Parliament was called, "The Merciless Parliament". Would we want our generation to be called, "The Merciless Generation?", the one that gave no way back for those who had offended whatever kind of 'ism' that was the unforgivable sin. As we worship here today, we may feel on the fringes of society, we may even buy into the view that we don't matter. Other people don't think what we think has anything to say therefore we have nothing to say. It is those on the fringes of society that often say what the rest of society needs to hear. The fact that so many people aren't into giving people a second chance shows why we are needed to give out the message, so they can have hope. If we don't say it in our circles, who will? Fortunately, there is a film out that talks of having a second chance. It is about a grumpy widower, who is given that second chance. It's called, "A Man Called Otto". We're needed to live out and to push that message. Others have a second chance. We want to say it to our society.

It's something we want to say to ourselves.

We have seen God give us a second chance. The person who constantly belittles us can have a second chance even if they show no sign of it with us.

The Methodist Minister, Rev. Don English, when he was minister at Cullercoats near Newcastle, knew someone who had gone off the rails. One day that young man came to Church. As they greeted each other at the door, Don English said to him, "I am still praying for you".

That person turned his life round, and he said that one of the reasons for it was what Don English said to him. Don always knew that there was a second chance.

Can you and I honestly say when someone has consistently been spiteful to us that we haven't thought with some satisfaction, "What goes around comes around?" She'll get what she deserves". It's only too understandable if the thought should flicker around us occasionally.

What thought do we stay with? He'll get what he deserves or there is always a second chance. When John said that Jesus takes away the sins of the world, he meant the sins of those who have been unjust to us, too. Are we big enough to include them in that, too, or do we need more of God's graciousness?

One thing we can't do, keep God to ourselves. The preacher went to a small church in the country. They had their own kind of service, they knew each other, they were all older people. The preacher, greatly bold, no doubt said a few nice things, and then asked the Church Secretary whether they were trying to get new people in.

The old man considered for a while.

"Oh, no! We're happy as we are".

If we have known God's kindness, we can't keep it to ourselves. Someone had popped into the doctor's surgery and expressed appreciation of the medical staff. The next person came in with some biscuits to share with the staff. They had a chat, appreciating what the doctors did. The first said to the biscuit bearer "I'll do that, too."

God's kindness cannot be kept within riverbanks. It was meant to overflow. God's kindness to us was meant to make our hearts overflow in kindness to other people. That includes always believing, despite all appearances, that they could have a second chance. Isn't that part of what it means to see, understand, and perceive what that phrase, 'The lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world,' means?

Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world. Jesus offers us, and others a new start. We travel with Him with this message into the coming year.

AMEN.

Prayers – Would you look at the photographs and pictures around you.

Picture a scene that is special to you. Picture a place that is special and thank God.

Look at a photograph of a member of your family. Have it in your mind and thank God for her/him.

Picture someone who is ill. Offer them before God.

Remember the news of the week, the strikes, the National Health Service, the railways and the rail unions, the postal workers. Offer the whole situation to God.

Remember Ukraine, Russia, Israel/Palestine, those disputes that seems irresolvable. Offer them to the strength and graciousness of God.

And your friends, and yourself with all they and you can give, and with all that concerns you. Ask for faith, hope, and God's love.

AMEN.

Hymn - StF 662 Have you heard God's voice

Have you heard God's voice; has your heart been stirred?

Are you still prepared to follow?

Have you made a choice to remain and serve,
though the way be rough and narrow?

Will you walk the path that will cost you much

and embrace the pain and sorrow?

Will you trust in One who entrusts to you the disciples of tomorrow?

Will you use your voice; will you not sit down

when the multitudes are silent?

Will you make a choice to stand your ground

when the crowds are turning violent?

Will you walk the path ...

In your city streets will you be God's heart?

Will you listen to the voiceless?

Will you stop and eat, and when friendships start,

will you share your faith with the faithless?

Will you walk the path ...

Will you watch the news with the eyes of faith

and believe it could be different?

Will you share your views using words of grace?

Will you leave a thoughtful imprint?

We will walk the path that will cost us much

and embrace the pain and sorrow.

We will trust in One who entrusts to us the disciples of tomorrow.

The Covenant:

As God made a Covenant with the people of Israel, so Jesus makes a Covenant with us, and all who would follow Him.

On the one side, God promises in this Covenant to give us a new life in Christ.

On the other side we promise to live no more for ourselves, but for Him.

Today, therefore, we meet, as generations of our mothers and fathers have met, to renew the Covenant which binds them, and binds us, to God.

Committed as I am to Jesus Christ, Committed as I am to each other, Committed as I am to this community, let me again accept my place with Him and others. With God's Spirit, I accept God's purpose for me and follow his call to love and serve Him in all my life. Christ has many services to be done. Some are easy, others are difficult. Some will bring praise, others criticism. Some we want to do. Others we do not.

In some we may please Christ and please ourselves.

In others, we cannot please Christ except by denying ourselves.

Yet the power to do all these things is given us by Christ, who strengthens us, and relies on us.

In obedience we hear your call. In love we seek to do your will. With joy we offer ourselves to you.

We are no longer our own but yours.

Please say.

I am no longer my own but yours.

Your wishes, not mine, be done in all things.

**Wherever you may place me, in all that I do
and in all that I may endure.**

**When there is work for me,
and when there is none,
when I am troubled and
when I am at peace.**

**Your will be done
when I am appreciated
and when I am disregarded,
when I find fulfillment
and when it is lacking;
when I have all things
and when I have nothing.**

**I willingly offer all I have and am
to serve you as and where you choose.**

**Glorious God in fullness, Father, Son, and Spirit, You are mine and I am yours. May it be so
forever.**

his covenant now made on earth, be ratified and fulfilled in heaven. AMEN.

Hymn - StF 67 This, this is the God we adore

This, this is the God we adore!
Our faithful, unchangeable friend,
whose love is as great as his power
and neither knows measure nor end:

'Tis Jesus the first and the last;
whose Spirit will guide us safe home;
we'll praise him for all that is past
and trust him for all that's to come.

Blessing

The blessing of God,
the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit,
be upon us and remain with us for ever.

Amen.

We go in peace to love and serve the Lord.

In the name of Christ. Amen.