

Week St Mary Methodist Church – Sunday 3 January



A new year is often a time of hope and optimism, and so it is this year with the prospect of vaccinations for Covid-19 beginning a return to normal life. But before we get there, we will likely face more difficulties and set-backs, as proven this week by Cornwall going into Tier 3 restrictions. We are still allowed to have physical church services, and you are all very welcome at 11am on Sundays, but please don't feel under any pressure at all to attend if you don't feel completely safe. We will continue to provide these weekly service sheets and fortnightly worship videos (the latest, for this week, is available on our Chapel website www.weekstmarymethodist.org.uk and facebook page www.facebook.com/ChapelWSM)

PRAYER

Lord, as we enter a new year let us give thanks for new beginnings. This year, in particular, we can realistically hope for the beginning of the end of the Covid pandemic. We pray that this year it will be brought under control, although this will require a fairer and more cooperative global response than we often achieve. We

pray for your blessing on other new beginnings, on our video services, and new ventures by others being tried in order to spread your word more widely. And we pray for all those given a new life, a new hope, by a new faith in your Son, Jesus Christ. **Amen**

READING FOR TODAY John 1:10-18 (NIV)

¹⁰ He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognise him. ¹¹ He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. ¹² Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God – ¹³ children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God.

¹⁴ The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

¹⁵ (John testified concerning him. He cried out, saying, 'This is the one I spoke about when I said, "He who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me."') ¹⁶ Out of his fullness we have all received grace in place of grace already given. ¹⁷ For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. ¹⁸ No one has ever seen God, but the one and only Son, who is himself God and is in the closest relationship with the Father, has made him known.

REFLECTION

This passage follows the famous opening words of John's Gospel – that begins 'In the beginning was the Word'. It is part of John's prologue that relates God's plan for humanity to the coming of Jesus, and we will concentrate on verses 11 and 12.

Do you think the world is an evil place? Do you think it is getting more evil? You could take an optimistic view of human progress, or given the very visible problems of the world, you could take a pessimistic view. The optimist might point to verse 12 and to all who did receive him; the pessimist might point to verse 11 and those who did not receive him.

We have just celebrated Christmas and one of the traditional views of Christmas is that we look at the coming of Jesus in a threefold way. Firstly, at the birth of Jesus, as God's son was sent in human

form to be the saviour of the world, as our reading put it 'The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us'. Secondly, we welcome Jesus into our hearts, we let him change us internally, as the reading puts it 'to all who did receive him'. And thirdly, we look forward to his coming again, at the end of times, when his Kingdom will be established and have no end.

Looking specifically at the second of those, welcoming Jesus into our hearts, it is worth thinking whether there is a link between the evils of this world and whether people have or have not received Jesus. This was prompted by thinking about Covid vaccination and how it might protect people, and then, looking at the world as it is, going on to think that we need to be vaccinated against evil. But we have that vaccination already – it is inviting Jesus into our hearts.

Is this a valid parallel, an allegory of protection against evil? We need enough people to receive Jesus to get herd immunity and defeat the pandemic of evil. It's not a perfect allegory. There are a number of ways in which it doesn't work. There are many non-Christian people working hard to combat evil, people driven by common humanity, or by other faiths. Also there are, or have certainly been in the past, people who are nominally Christians but who are still capable of evil. But it is a very topical parallel, and worth thinking about. So, perhaps our resolutions this year should be to keep Jesus in our hearts and so vaccinate ourselves against evil, as well as vaccinating ourselves against Covid.

PRAYER FOR OTHERS

As we enter a new year with hope let us pray for the many people who do not share in that hope –

- For those whose location and circumstances mean that they have no prospect of vaccination against covid
- For those where covid is eclipsed by war, starvation, and other disease
- For those already gripped by the virus, and for those caring or grieving for loved ones lost to the virus
- For those in care homes who have missed a year's contact with loved ones and have lost all hope for the future
- For those who have already suffered severe financial difficulties, and despair for their future.

HYMN H&P 109, StF 208

Let earth and heaven combine,
Angels and men agree,
To praise in songs divine
The incarnate Deity,
Our God contracted to a span,
Incomprehensibly made Man.

He laid His glory by,
He wrapped Him in our clay;
Unmarked by human eye,

The latent Godhead lay;
Infant of days He here became,
And bore the mild Immanuel's Name.

Unsearchable the love
That has the Saviour brought;
The grace is far above
Or men or angels' thought:
Suffice for us that God, we know,
Our God, is manifest below.

He deigns in flesh to appear,
Widest extremes to join;
To bring our vileness near,
And make us all divine:
And we the life of God shall know,
For God is manifest below.

Made perfect first in love,
And sanctified by grace,
We shall from earth remove,
And see His glorious face:
His love shall then be fully showed,
And man shall all be lost in God.
(Charles Wesley)

BLESSING

And the blessing of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, be upon us and remain with us always.
Amen