

Christ Church United Reformed Church, Raleigh
Service Sunday 01 January 2023

New Year is a time for both looking back and looking forward. After all Janus the God after whom January is named has one face looking forward and one looking back.

Our service this morning will reflect that, the first part reflecting on the last year and the second looking forward to the year ahead .Before we begin though let me wish everyone her this morning, those who will be watching the service live on Facebook either now or later and all those listening to a recording of the service, a happy and prosperous New Year. May we move forward together in Christ to meet whatever the new year holds.

Call to worship:

Praise God from the heavens

Praise Him from the skies above

Praise God, angels and all the hosts of heaven

Praise Him, sun, moon and stars

Praise God all creatures everywhere

Praise Him, men and women, young and old

Let all the earth bring praise to the Lord

At whose creation came into being,

Let us therefore praise and worship our God.

Hymn R&S 169 (omitting verse 5)

Unto us a boy is born!

King of all creation,

Came he to a world forlorn,

The Lord of every nation.

Christ from heaven descending low
comes, on earth a stranger;
ox and ass their Owner know,
becradled in the manger.

Herod then with fear was filled:
A prince he said "in Jewry!"
all the little boys he killed
at Bethlehem in his fury.

Now may Mary's son, who came
So long ago to love us,
Lead us all with hearts aflame
Unto the joys above us.

Prayer for the past year

Lord God in remembering your goodness to us over the past year;
We approach your throne of grace in humility and awe.

We give thanks that you have been with us through all our trials and
tribulations,

You have been with us for joyous occasions and also for occasions filled
with sadness,

For occasions full of certainty and occasions full of doubt as well.

We give thanks for your ever-loving presence, for the guidance of your
Son,

Jesus Christ who died on the cross at Calvary and took on his broad
back the sins that we have committed.

We give thanks to for the strengthening presence of your Holy Spirit that enabled us to do your will.

Creator God, we remember all those whom you have called home over the past year

Especially your loving servants who were members of this congregation.

We stand at the beginning of a new year, Lord grateful for your love, knowing that your son Jesus Christ

Has walked alongside us and your Holy Spirit has sustained us.

We now join in the Lord's prayer (modern version):

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 forever.

AMEN

Music: "A Chorale from St. Matthew's Passion

Readings: Psalm 8 is

Matthew Ch. 25 vv31-46

Talk

Here we are once more at the beginning of a new year when we reflect on what has been and what may be. It is a time when we remember those whom we have lost; those things that we could have done better and ask forgiveness for those whom we have hurt, however unwittingly.

But a new year is also a time to reflect as Christians as to what has been the sustaining love that has accompanied us in the past and will continue to do so in the year ahead. I think this is particularly important for us in Christ Church as we have major questions to consider and decisions to take.. with regard and crowned them with glory to our proposed building project.

The first of our readings Psalm 8 is a psalm of praise, for as King David says at both the beginning and end “ Adonai our Lord, how excellent is Your Name over all the earth” He asks God, how after all he has created, he cares for mere mortals? He has created them inferior only to himself and crowned them with glory and honour. God has appointed them rulers over everything he has made. You might well say this is all in the past but what has it do with us in the 21st. century?

The answer is everything for he is still with us. God is our past and our future and furthermore gave us the gift of Jesus Christ! Our new testament The reading from St. Matthew’s gives us an idea of what that gift means for us. The parable contained in this reading is one of the most vivid in the Gospels and for once the lesson is crystal clear! God will judge us in reaction to human need. His judgement does not depend on the knowledge we have amassed, or the fame we have required, or even the fortune we may have acquired – No!! we shall be judged on the help that we have given. If we read this parable it gives some understanding about the help we must give.

Firstly, it must be help in simple things, like feeding a hungry person or giving a thirsty person a drink, welcoming a stranger, cheering the sick, visiting the prisoner are things that any one can do and I must admit that one of the things that has saddened me most in the last year has been the lack of enthusiasm shown in starting up the drop-in café and then the warm space initiative. These are easy things for us to do. They do not require us to give away vast sums of money, or writing our names in the annals of history, just humility and kindness shown to our fellow man,

Secondly it must be help that is uncalculating. In the parable those who helped did not think that they were helping Christ and thus getting eternal merit for themselves; they helped because they responded to their natural instinct, an uncalculating reaction of a loving heart. The people who had not helped said of course if they had known they were helping him they would have done so, but they only saw some insignificant being, not worthy of their help. Help given out of a desire to reap praise, but that is not help in the true sense of the word and indeed it is not generosity, it is disguised selfishness. The help that wins God's approval is that given for no other reason than a desire to help.

Finally, we are confronted with the a great truth that all such help is given to Jesus and help which is withheld is withheld from Jesus. If for example, we really wish to bring delight to those who are parents, if we really want to move them to gratitude the best way to do it is to help the children, hence the need for foodbanks, for toy banks for free school meals, which all bring joy to parents as they see them as helping them to help their children. God is a wonderful Father and the way to delight his helps others in the simplest heart is to help the children as well as our fellow men and women. When we accept the lesson that generosity given without any hidden agenda, helps others in the simplest things, we too will know the joy of helping Jesus Christ himself.

So let us move forward in 2023, resolving to help others. Our building project for example, will cost a great deal of money, but in the end it will hopefully help us to create partnerships within the community that will help others, equally, our warm space will help to give others a time away from cold homes whilst giving them hot drinks and a cake or a biscuit and in doing so may we know that we have delighted not only God, but also our Saviour Jesus Christ.

Prayer

Loving Creator God, Help us to help others not counting the cost or advantage to ourselves, but giving help from a loving heart. **Amen**

Hymn R&S 188

Born in the night,

Mary's child,

A long way from your home, coming in need,

Mary's child,

Born in a borrowed room.

Clear shining Light,
Mary's Child,
Your face lights up our way;
Light of the world,
Mary's child,
Dawn on our darkest day.

Truth of our life,
Mary's child,
You tell us God is good;
Prove it is true
Mary's child
Go to your cross of wood.

Hope of the world,
Mary's child,
You're coming to soon to reign, King of the earth,
Mary's child,
Walk in our streets again.

Prayers of intercession

Hymn R&S 705 (verses 1, 3, 4, 5, and 6)

O God our help in ages past,
our hope for years to come,

our shelter from the stormy blast,
and our eternal home.

Before the hills in order stood,
Or earth received her frame,
From everlasting thou art God,
To endless years the same.

A thousand ages in thy sight,
Are like an evening gone,
Short as the watch that ends the night
Before the rising sun.

Time, like an ever-rolling stream
Bears all our years away;
They fly forgotten as a dream
Dies at the opening day.

O God our help in ages past,
our hope for years to come,
be thou our guard while troubles last.
and our eternal home.

Blessing and dismissal:

The Lord bless you and keep you
the lord make his face to shine upon you,
the lord lift up his countenance upon you,

and give you peace.

Our service has ended go forth in the name of your Lord Jesus Christ,
knowing that he walks beside you with every step you take
and knowing that God's Holy Spirit sustains and strengthens you
with its power, its grace and its love,

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