

January 2017

A happy and blessed New Year to you all!! (For my New Year message please below)

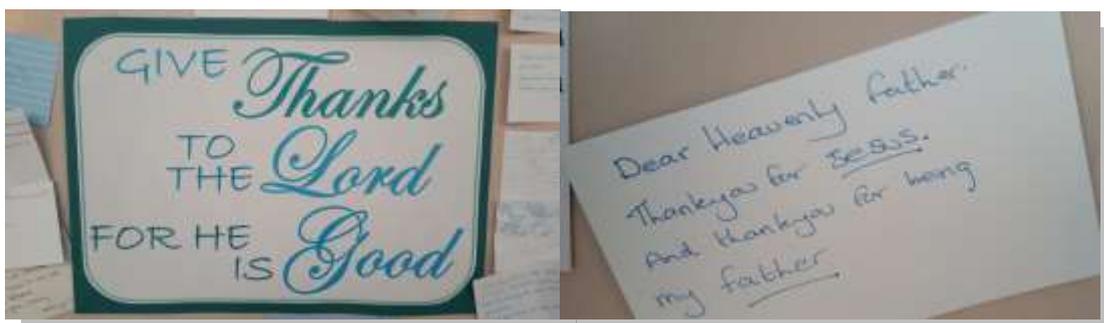
New Year's Day fell upon a Sunday and the fellowship at Friars Green had decided to hold a morning service as usual. Somewhat more unusually we decided to come together early and share breakfast together that Gill Jacks kindly prepared. The breakfast was lovely and leading the service was a joy – a great way to start 2017.

Sunday 8th January saw me back at Friars Green leading the church in our annual Covenant Service. This is loosely based on Wesley's Covenant Service and always proves to be a challenge and a blessing in equal measure! The evening was spent leading the service at our West Street Chapel in Thatto Heath – A church which is currently seeing vision refreshed and looking toward some major building works in order to make a greater impact for the Kingdom.



(Above: Friends at West Street, Thatto Heath, St Helens)

On Saturday 14th January it was nice to be able to attend the Coffee Morning at Friars Green and meet with a growing circle of friends who do not attend Sunday Worship. On the Sunday morning I was preaching at Bryn chapel and enjoyed a warm and attentive reception as always. I was again impressed by a "Thank-you door" that they have where people are encouraged to pin their prayers of thanks to the Lord.



Friday 20th January was the regular Admin Meeting at the Resource Centre followed by a Finance meeting on the Saturday. A busy weekend was completed with me preaching at Barnoldswick Chapel on Sunday morning – Although I had been to Barnoldswick in October last year for Connexional Committee, it had been some twenty plus years since I had preached there. It was good that Sue could accompany me and we were impressed by the changes that we saw – The service met in the impressive Sunday School rooms and it was good to see a bigger congregation than those years before. We then shared refreshments and great fellowship before showing Sue the renovated chapel – even venturing up to the balcony that was closed for safety reasons twenty years ago. I pray that we may see the buildings filled again to the glory of God!



(Above: Barnoldswick Chapel in the middle and the Sunday School just beyond)

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(The body at Barnoldswick)



(Barnoldswick's renovated chapel from the upper gallery)

Friday 27th January had me ministering at our Buckley Street Chapel in Warrington, where I had been asked to lead the service for the funeral of the late Ethel Ferris, a well-known and well-loved member of the chapel. My condolences to Mary, Pat and all the family.

(New Year message next...)

New Year Message In The Year of Our Lord 2017

First and foremost, as I share these few thoughts with you, may I wish every reader a truly happy and blessed New Year!

As we leave behind 2016 we have no doubt reflected on the events of the past year – Brexit, Donald Trump and the U.S. Presidential elections, the ongoing troubles in Syria and the Middle East, the deaths of so many celebrities, earthquakes in Italy and New Zealand and numerous other memorable events.

Such a summary, however, fails to give an accurate snapshot of any year, as many of the truly memorable things only become significant as more years pass by. Consider, for a moment, the year 1809. The international scene was dominating the news. Napoleon was sweeping through Austria and blood was flowing freely. Nobody then cared about babies. But the world was overlooking some terribly significant births. For example, William Gladstone was born that year. He was destined to become one of our finest statesmen. That same year, Alfred Tennyson was born to an obscure minister and his wife. The child would one day greatly affect the literary world in a marked manner. It was also in that same year that a physician by the name Darwin and his wife, named their child Charles Robert. On the American continent, in Boston, Edgar Allan Poe began his eventful, albeit tragic, life. And that same year produced the cries of a newborn infant in a rugged log cabin in Hardin County, Kentucky. The baby's name? Abraham, Abraham Lincoln.

If there had been news broadcasts at that time, I'm certain these words would have been heard: *"The destiny of the world is being shaped on an Austrian battlefield today."* Reviews of the year would have focussed on the armed struggle, but history was actually being shaped in the cradles of England and America. Similarly, two thousand plus years ago, everyone around Palestine thought taxation and the Roman occupation was the big news. But quietly, a young Jewish woman cradled the biggest news of all: the birth of the Saviour – our Lord Jesus Christ.

Jesus entered our world to model a revolutionary different way – a way of love and grace – a way that would lead to His death upon a rough wooden cross where He paid the price for our sins, bringing us forgiveness and new life in Him. A way that would and does change the world...

I wonder, as we look forward in 2017, are you daunted by the recent memories of the year that is past? Don't be! Rather, let us be encouraged, trusting in God and learning to love as God loves us – it may not seem earth-shattering, but actually, it is world changing – remember, without love we are just a noisy gong or clanging symbol... not really doing anything that will last! (*1 Corinthians 13*)

Finally, thank you for your love, support and prayers throughout 2016 and let us look forward with renewed hope for 2017, for God is Love and, in Him, all things are possible.

Yours in Christ Jesus

Ken McDermott, Connexional President.