



Welcome to Blackburn Baptist Church, on January 8th 2023 at 10:45, meeting at Bethesda Chapel.

Whilst some are able to meet in person, others we know are still at home. We hope and pray that you will find this outline of our service helpful, as we seek to worship God as a Church family, wherever we are.

Our service today is being led by Alec, and is a Covenant Renewal Service.

Alec begins with a Welcome, then shares the Notices, which have been (and are again) shown on the screen. We are reminded that there will be a Church Members Meeting following the service next Sunday, January 15th.

We are invited by Alec to join in our Opening hymn, which Trevor plays on the piano.

Take my life and let it be consecrated, Lord, to thee.
Take my moments and my days; let them flow in endless praise.

Take my hands and let them move at the impulse of thy love.
Take my feet and let them be swift and beautiful for thee.

Take my voice and let me sing always, only, for my King.
Take my lips and let them be filled with messages from thee.

Take my silver and my gold; not a mite would I withhold.
Take my intellect and use every power as thou shalt choose.

Take my will and make it thine; it shall be no longer mine.
Take my heart it is thine own; it shall be thy royal throne.

Take my love; my Lord, I pour at thy feet its treasure store.
Take myself, and I will be ever, only, all for thee.

Authors: Frances Ridley Havergal, Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart CCLI SONG # 2873921 Public Domain. CCL No 5664

Alec introduces the Covenant, which is shown on the screen; **the congregation are invited to join together saying the words in Bold type**, the remaining words are read by Alec as Leader. It begins with

The Greeting

Lord, You have been our dwelling place in all generations
You are the one true God who reigns forever.

Opening Prayer:

Almighty God, You search our hearts and you see every part of us. All our desires are known to You, and from you no secrets are hidden. By the inspiration of Your Holy Spirit, cleanse our hearts so we may perfectly love you and glorify Your holy name. We pray this through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

Now let us pray together:

**Our Father in heaven, holy is Your Name
Your Kingdom come, Your will be done on earth as in heaven
Give us today Your daily bread and forgive our sins as we forgive
those who sin against us.
Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil.
For the Kingdom, the power, and the glory are Yours, both now and
forever. Amen.**

Brenda is asked to come to share the first Bible Reading: John 15:1-8

"I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful. You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. Remain in me, as I also remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me.

"I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. If you do not remain in me, you are like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.

The Proclamation

Dearly loved brothers and sisters, the Christian life is a life found in Christ, redeemed from sin, and consecrated to God. We are those who have entered into this life and have been admitted into the new covenant of Jesus Christ. He is the Mediator of this covenant. He sealed it with His own blood so it would last forever.

On one side of this covenant stands God, who promises to give us new life in Jesus Christ, the author and perfecter of our faith. Every day God proves His goodness and grace to us, showing us that His promise still stands firm.

On the other side, we stand as those who promise to no longer live life for ourselves but instead to only live for Jesus Christ because He has loved us and given His life for us.

There are times in our lives when it is important for us to remember and reaffirm our promises and vows. In this same way, we come today to renew our covenant with God. Many generations have done this before us. Today we make the covenant our own, renewing with both joy and sincerity the covenant that binds us all to God.

The Confession

We are those who seek to live as true disciples of Jesus Christ, but sometimes we fall short. Let us now examine ourselves before God, humbly confessing our sins and submitting our hearts so that we do not deceive ourselves and cut ourselves away from God.

Let us pray together:

Father God, You have set forth the way of life through Your Son Jesus Christ, whom You love dearly. We shamefully confess that we have been slow to learn of Him and have been reluctant to follow Him. You have spoken and called to us but we have not listened. You have revealed Your beauty to us, but we have been blind. You have stretched out Your hands to us through our friends, but we have passed by them. We have accepted Your gifts and offered little thanks. We are unworthy of Your unchanging love.

We now confess to you our sins.

Please forgive us for the poverty of our worship...
for the selfishness of our prayers...
for our inconsistency and unbelief...
for the ways we neglect fellowship and Your grace...
for our hesitation to tell others about Christ...
for the ways we deceive others...

Forgive us for when we waste time and when we misuse the gifts you have given us. Forgive us for when we have made excuses for the wrong things we have done and when we have purposefully avoided responsibility.

Forgive us that we have been unwilling to overcome evil with good and that we have not been ready to carry our cross. Forgive us that we have not allowed Your love to work through us to help others and that we have not made their suffering our own. Forgive us for those times when instead of working for unity we made it hard for others to live with us because of our lack of forgiveness, inconsiderate judgment, and quick criticism.

Forgive us for when we have not tried to reconcile with others and when we have been slow to seek redemption.

Forgive us also for these sins that we silently confess to you now.

Words of Assurance and Pardon

God, the Father of all mercies, is faithful to cleanse us from our sins and restore us to Christ's image. Praise and glory be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!
Amen.

The Invitation

Let us gathered here before the Lord now in covenant commit ourselves to Christ as his servants. Let us give ourselves to Him so that we may fully belong to Him. Jesus Christ has left us with many services to be done. Some of these services are easy and honourable, but some are difficult and disgraceful. Some line up with our desires and interests, others are contrary to both. In some we please both Christ and ourselves, but then there are other works where we cannot please Christ except by denying ourselves.

We offer this prayer to God in Jesus Christ:

Let me be Your servant. Let me follow your commands. I will no longer follow my own desires. I give myself completely to your will.

The power and strength to live as true servants is given to us in Christ. We accept the place and work that He gives us, acknowledging that He alone will be our reward.

I am not my own. I am Yours alone. Make me into what You will. Rank me with those You will. Put me to use for You. Put me to suffering for You. Let me be employed for You. Let me be laid aside for You. Let me be lifted high for You. Let me be brought low for You. Let me be full or let me be empty. Let me have all things or let me have nothing. With a willing heart, I freely give everything to Your pleasure and disposal.

Christ is Saviour to those who are His true servants. He is the source of all salvation to those who obey. To be His servant is to consent fully to His will. Christ accepts nothing less. Christ will be all in all, or he will be nothing.

Now confirm this truth in holy covenant. Make it a reality in your life in these ways:

First, set apart time in your day, maybe more than once, to be spent alone with the Lord. Seek to perceive God's special care for you and gracious acceptance of you. Carefully think through the words of this covenant and its conditions. Examine your heart, even if you have freely given your life to Christ. Name the sins in your life. Reflect on whether you are willing to choose Christ's holy laws and strict commands. Be sure you are clear in all of these so you do not lie to God!

Second, uphold a serious spirit of holy awe and reverence.

Third, claim God's covenant. Do not trust in your own strength and power but rely upon God's promise of giving grace and strength. In this way, He will empower you to keep your promise.

Fourth, be determined to be faithful. You have given your heart and life to God. You have opened your mouth to dedicate yourself to the Lord. With God's power, never go back to your former way of living.

And last, be prepared to renew your covenant with God. Let us open our hearts before God.

The Covenant Prayer

Let us pray together:

My righteous God, for the sake of Your Son Jesus Christ, see me now as I fall down before You. Forgive my unfaithfulness when I have not done your will. You promise mercy if I turn to You with my whole heart.

God requires that we rid ourselves of every idol in your life.

From the bottom of my heart, I here and now renounce every idol in my life, covenanting with You that I will not commit any known sin. By turning against Your will I have turned my love toward the world. In Your power I will watch for any temptation that will lead me away from You.

Do you acknowledge the Lordship of Christ in your life?

Before all heaven and earth, I here and now acknowledge You, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, as my Lord and God. I vow to give all of myself, body and soul, to be Your servant and to serve You in holiness and righteousness all the days of my life.

Jesus Christ is the only way and means to God. God has given us Jesus as the way and means to salvation.

Jesus, I here and now accept You as the only new and living Way. I join myself in covenant with You. I come to You hungry, sinful, miserable, blind, and naked, unworthy even to wash the feet of Your servants. With all my power, I accept You as my Lord and Head. I renounce my own unworthiness, and vow that You are the Lord, my righteousness. I renounce my own wisdom and take You for my only guide. I renounce my own will and take Your will as my law.

Christ has told you that you must suffer with him.

Jesus, I here and now make this covenant with You and accept whatever comes in life. Through Your grace I promise that neither life nor death will separate me from You.

God has given holy laws as the rule of your life.

I here and now willingly take on Your yoke and burden. All Your laws are holy, just, and good. I accept them as the rule for my words, thoughts, and actions, promising I will strive to order my whole life around your direction. I will not allow myself to neglect anything I know to be my duty.

The Almighty God searches and knows you, even the thoughts of your heart.

O God, You know that we have made this covenant today in sincerity, without deceit or reluctance. If You find anything false in us, guide us and help us to set it right. And now, glory be to You, God the Father. From this day forward, I shall look upon You as my God and Father. Glory be to You, God the Son. You have loved me and washed me from my sins in Your own blood. From this day forward, I shall look upon You as my Saviour and Redeemer. Glory be to You, O God the Holy Spirit. By Your almighty power, You have turned my heart from sin to God. From this day forward I shall look upon You as my Comforter and Guide. O mighty God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, you have now become my Covenant Friend. And I, through Your infinite grace, have become Your covenant servant. You are mine and I am Yours. So be it. May this covenant that I have made here on earth be ratified in heaven. Amen.

Alec invited all to watch *The Creed*, sung by Hillsong and filmed in Kyiv, Ukraine, joining with the singing if so desired.

Our Father everlasting, the all-creating One,
God Almighty, through your Holy Spirit
conceiving Christ the Son, Jesus our Saviour.

I believe in God our Father, I believe in Christ the Son
I believe in the Holy Spirit, Our God is three in One.
I believe in the resurrection, that we will rise again,
for I believe in the Name of Jesus.

Our Judge and our Defender, suffered and crucified,
forgiveness is in You, descended into darkness,
You rose in glorious light, forever seated high.

I believe in God our Father.....

I believe in You, I believe You rose again
I believe that Jesus Christ is Lord
(I believe)
And I believe in You, I believe You rose again
I believe that Jesus Christ is Lord

I believe in God our Father.....

I believe in God our Father.....

For I believe in the Name of Jesus, for I believe in the Name of Jesus
(We believe in Lord Jesus)

I believe in life eternal, I believe in the virgin birth,
I believe in the saints' communion, and in Your Holy Church.
I believe in the resurrection, when Jesus comes again
for I believe in the Name of Jesus

We join together in our Offertory hymn, again shown on the screen

Just as I am, without one plea, but that thy blood was shed for me,
and that thou bidd' st me come to thee, O Lamb of God, I come, I come.

Just as I am, and waiting not to rid my soul of one dark blot,
to thee, whose blood can cleanse each spot, O Lamb of God, I come, I come.

Just as I am, though tossed about with many a conflict, many a doubt,
fightings and fears within, without, O Lamb of God, I come, I come.

Just as I am, thou wilt receive, wilt welcome, pardon, cleanse, relieve;
because thy promise I believe, O Lamb of God, I come, I come.

Just as I am (thy love unknown has broken every barrier down)
now to be thine, yea thine alone, O Lamb of God I come, I come.

Authors: Charlotte Elliott, William Batchelder Bradbury CCLI SONG # 23206 Copyrights: Words and music Public Domain CCL No 5664
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8rmCN-w_Gk

Alec prayed: Loving Heavenly Father, we thank you for your Son that you sent into the world, your only beloved son, to die for us that we might be forgiven and through your resurrection have new life in you. We will never die, you are preparing a place for us and we look forward to the day when you come. Come soon Lord Jesus. We thank you for all the gifts that you have given us through our time on this earth and we ask you to bless those we have given back to you for the extension of your kingdom this place and elsewhere. For we pray in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and for his sake. Amen.

Graham then came to read our second Bible passage, reading from Isaiah chapter 40: 9-31

You who bring good news to Zion, go up on a high mountain.
You who bring good news to Jerusalem, lift up your voice with a shout,
lift it up, do not be afraid; say to the towns of Judah, "Here is your God!"

See, the Sovereign Lord comes with power, and he rules with a mighty arm.
See, his reward is with him, and his recompense accompanies him.

He tends his flock like a shepherd: He gathers the lambs in his arms
and carries them close to his heart; he gently leads those that have young.

Who has measured the waters in the hollow of his hand,
or with the breadth of his hand marked off the heavens?

Who has held the dust of the earth in a basket, or weighed the mountains on the scales
and the hills in a balance?

Who can fathom the Spirit of the Lord, or instruct the Lord as his counsellor?

Whom did the Lord consult to enlighten him, and who taught him the right way?
Who was it that taught him knowledge, or showed him the path of understanding?
Surely the nations are like a drop in a bucket; they are regarded as dust on the scales;
he weighs the islands as though they were fine dust.
Lebanon is not sufficient for altar fires, nor its animals enough for burnt offerings.
Before him all the nations are as nothing; they are regarded by him as worthless
and less than nothing.
With whom, then, will you compare God? To what image will you liken him?
As for an idol, a metalworker casts it, and a goldsmith overlays it with gold and fashions
silver chains for it.
A person too poor to present such an offering selects wood that will not rot;
they look for a skilled worker to set up an idol that will not topple.
Do you not know?
Have you not heard?
Has it not been told you from the beginning?
Have you not understood since the earth was founded?
He sits enthroned above the circle of the earth, and its people are like grasshoppers.
He stretches out the heavens like a canopy, and spreads them out like a tent to live in.
He brings princes to naught and reduces the rulers of this world to nothing.
No sooner are they planted, no sooner are they sown,
no sooner do they take root in the ground than he blows on them and they wither,
and a whirlwind sweeps them away like chaff.
"To whom will you compare me? Or who is my equal?" says the Holy One.
Lift up your eyes and look to the heavens: Who created all these?
He who brings out the starry host one by one and calls forth each of them by name.
Because of his great power and mighty strength, not one of them is missing.
Why do you complain, Jacob? Why do you say, Israel,
"My way is hidden from the Lord; my cause is disregarded by my God?"
Do you not know? Have you not heard?
The Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth.
He will not grow tired or weary, and his understanding no one can fathom.
He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak.
Even youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall;
but those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength.
They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary,
they will walk and not be faint.

Alec introduces our next song, once more shown on the screen

Mine are days that God has numbered, I was made to walk with Him,
yet I look for worldly treasure and forsake the King of kings;
but mine is hope in my Redeemer, though I fall, His love is sure,
for Christ has paid for every failing, I am His forevermore.

Mine are tears in times of sorrow, darkness not yet understood,
through the valley I must travel, Where I see no earthly good;

but mine is peace that flows from heaven and the strength in times of need,
I know my pain will not be wasted ,Christ completes his work in me.

Mine are days here as a stranger, pilgrim on a narrow way,
One with Christ I will encounter harm and hatred for His name;
but mine is armour for this battle, strong enough to last the war,
and He has said He will deliver safely to the golden shore.
And mine are keys to Zion city where beside the King I walk,
for there my heart has found its treasure, Christ is mine forevermore.
Come rejoice now, O my soul, for His love is my reward;
fear is gone and hope is sure, Christ is mine forevermore.
Come rejoice now, O my soul...
Come rejoice now, O my soul...

And mine are keys to Zion city where beside the King I walk,
for there my heart has found its treasure, Christ is mine forevermore.
Christ is mine forevermore.
Christ is mine forevermore.

Authors: Jonny Robinson, Rich Thompson CCLI SONG # 7036096 Copyrights ©2016 CityAlight Music (Admin. by Integrity Music Ltd)
CCL No 5664 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=roQovDZeAWE>

Alec now brings his Message entitled: “BRINGERS OF GOOD NEWS” which is accompanied by various slides shown on the screen.

In our New Year`s Day service we said our message is the same this year as last year but in a changing world the ways in which we communicate the good news need to be relevant, need to speak to where people are, to interact with and respond with God`s answers to the realities of their everyday lives. To put it more simply we are not going to water down the message but we are to make sure that everyone may come to Jesus Christ who gives us living water.

Jesus said to the woman at the well, “Those who drink this water will get thirsty again, but those who drink the water that I will give them will never be thirsty again. The water that I will give them, (says Jesus), will become in them a spring which will provide them with life-giving water and give them eternal life.”

Why did Jesus go to the well? He was very tired from his journeying around. In one sense he didn`t really need the water. But the woman needed Him, the source of living water, the source of life, the source of life in 2023 for each and every day. So He went to the place to which He knew she was coming.

Look closely for a minute at this picture. Who do you see? Can you see your neighbour? Can you see your family? Can you see your friends? Can you see the people living where you live, working where you work, shopping where you shop, relaxing where you relax? Can you see the people living right next to this building all of whom need to meet Jesus, the source of living water; who all need to know and see the love of God in Jesus Christ shown in the way we live, in the way we relate to one another and to them. What a joy it is to share the love of God with others; the God who is patient and kind, gracious and merciful, righteous and holy, all-knowing and all-powerful.

What is God doing? He has just been preparing messengers; the messengers live out and tell the truth, and God does the rest.

There is no limit to what God can do in this area, in this borough, in this land. But the One who Himself came into the world to give us new life, who knows what it means to be a human being and give your life for others even to the point of death has chosen those whom He has called to know Him to share the message of love and forgiveness from the living God to those with whom they are in contact in their normal everyday lives. With God nothing, absolutely nothing, is impossible. But without Him I can do nothing.

God's people look to God to accomplish his purposes. God never actually suffers setbacks. He overcomes all the hindrances. He travels without difficulty, he always arrives without fail, and he's always where he needs to be at the right time.

He has given us a message to proclaim; He prepares us and transforms us to reveal who He is. This is an ongoing process. It doesn't usually happen at the press of a button. The glory of the Lord will be revealed says Isaiah and all mankind together will see it for the mouth of the Lord has spoken. Don't ever try and do anything against God. When He speaks, the earth moves. And in verse 9 of Isaiah 40 God says "You who bring good tidings to Zion go up on a high mountain".

This is not a challenge to the fellowship to organise a group outing to the Lake District or to Urrwithva (Yr Wyddfa), Snowdonia or to Ben Nevis or even to the alpine regions of the continent of Europe to be able to talk about Jesus there. It is a challenge to us to make sure that we put ourselves in a position where the message of Jesus can be heard; so you can bring a cup of coffee to the guy freezing sitting on the pavement next to Tesco's on Bank Top; so you can speak to the guys who sleep at the market entrance side of the main shopping centre; so you can be aware of what is going on where you are each day, where you live and work and eat and relax and greet people and make them feel welcome where they are. And tell them about Jesus when you have an opportunity to do so. Because I can almost guarantee you that however well we may as necessary and appropriate renovate this building most people will not come into it until they first realise their need of God in Jesus Christ and when they know that He lives in this fellowship. It is God who speaks to man. But He chooses to use us to do it.

There is nothing wrong with bringing people from other churches, from Eastern Europe, from Preston, from Rossendale or indeed from anywhere to help us in revealing the glory of the Lord in this place for we are not able to do this alone nor do I think we should.

So we are like together with I don't know who and where, neither do I know what we might be doing; but we are together with these people and then we brawl at them, or scream at them or something because it says in the Word of God, "Lift up your voice with a shout"? No, no, no it doesn't mean that we behave like that and maybe even scare them out of their wits or worse. It means when we have a chance we speak clearly, like we say well since I've been going along to BBC in Galligreaves I've been so moved and excited by the way in which the people treat each other and by the way they say they are simply living the way Jesus did so I was so touched by that that I wanted to get to know this Jesus and I do know Him now. Would you like to get to know Jesus too?

So you say but I am shy, I am simply scared to do that. Really? I am basically shy too. God's Word says, don't be afraid, "say to the towns of East Lancashire, say to the people of Blackburn with Darwen, "Here is your God" and let God Himself do the rest.

I think I mentioned once before the time I met the really powerful sumo wrestler Konishiki. He came to our area to take part in a mochitsukitaikai, that is to say in a gathering where people all got together to

make rice cake, frequently at New Year. What goes on looks a bit like what you can see on the screen right now. His name Konishiki means little Nishiki. This means little brocade, but he weighed 287 kilos. He was an extremely powerful Hawaiian-born Japanese Sumo wrestler who reached the class of an Ooseki; and here he is.

So Konishiki exits the restaurant Denny's through a double door sideways and grins with a gentle smile. He was so powerful and so strong but inside he was so very gentle and had a tender heart. Even as he smashed into the rice mass giving it several massive blows with a small wooden hammer he smiled quietly and looked sensitively at the onlookers.

You see there are two things here in this passage of Isaiah that are so relevant to our mission here today. Can you see what they are? Look at Isaiah 40:10-11. It says the Lord is powerful and He is tender. What a marvellous combination.

To whom then will you compare God says Isaiah. Our God is a consuming fire. He comes with power. He shakes the earth. He made the heavens and created the earth. He sits enthroned above the circle of the earth and its people are like grasshoppers. He brings princes to naught and reduces the rulers of this world to nothing. Because of his great power and mighty strength not one of the stars is missing.

So tell people how great, how powerful and how majestic our God is.

But tell them also how tender He is. Verse 11 reads: "He tends his flock like a shepherd: He gathers the lambs in his arms and carries them close to his heart; he gently leads those that have young."

Before God we have today re-committed our lives to Him. That is a wonderful thing to have done; and we are His messengers, the bringers of good news; and that is no less awesome and amazing. Let us go from this place rejoicing and share the riches of his love wherever we are and wherever we go with whoever we meet whatever we are doing.

But let us not forget that the life of the one into whose likeness we are being transformed knew a wilderness facing the attacks of the enemy, a Gethsemane where he learned again what it means to follow his Father at all costs and a traitor. Are we prepared for these kind of transformation experiences?

Judas had the best pastor, the best teacher, the best advisor and the best counsellor but he failed.

The problem is not the church leadership or the church to which we go. If our attitude or character doesn't change or our heart doesn't transform we will always be the same. I think I am right in saying that we have made that choice today.

We join together in our Closing song, again shown on the screen

I, the Lord of sea and sky, I have heard my people cry.

All who dwell in deepest sin my hand will save.

I who made the stars of night, I will make their darkness bright.

Who will bear my light to them? Whom shall I send?

Here I am Lord. Is it I Lord?

I have heard you calling in the night.

I will go Lord, if you lead me.

I will hold your people in my heart.

I, the Lord of snow and rain, I have borne my people's pain.
I have wept for love of them, they turn away.
I will break their hearts of stone, give them hearts for love alone.
I will speak my word to them, whom shall I send?
Here I am Lord. Is it I Lord?...

I, the Lord of wind and flame, I will tend the poor and lame.
I will set a feast for them, my hand will save.
Finest bread I will provide till their hearts be satisfied.
I will give my life to them. Whom shall I send?
Here I am Lord. Is it I Lord?....

Writer: Daniel Schutte Copyright ©1985 New Dawn Music, Kingsway Music CCL no 5664

Alec shares a Blessing

May our God, who establishes covenant relationship with those who seek to enter the Kingdom, be with you always. May Jesus Christ, who seals the new covenant with his blood on the cross, bring you peace. May the Holy Spirit guide your life both now and for ever. Go in peace to serve the Lord!

Amen.

We all say together *The Grace*

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all, evermore, Amen.