

Dear Friends,

The beginning of a new year is often a time to look back and then to look ahead. In looking back, it tends to be the highlights and the low points we immediately turn to as these were the times when normal life was interrupted for some reason. In trying to summarise the year, we look for the themes that have characterised it in some way. Looking forward inevitably means that we cannot use the same yardstick as we don't yet know what the high and low points will be. We may be able to begin to sense what some of the themes might be, even though the past is no indicator of the future.

Through the Christmas period we have been reflecting on the coming of Jesus Christ to the world as the Saviour. He is Emmanuel which means God with us. Whether we are looking back or stepping into the future, God is always with us, walking alongside us in Jesus and guiding us through the Holy Spirit. God is the constant person in the whole of our lives and the world. The final words attributed to John Wesley are 'the best of all is, God is with us!' I don't know what your final words of 2023 were, but these would be good ones to quote in many circumstances. They don't need to be the final words in a particular situation, but could be the words we use now, and in the days and weeks to come.

During January we will be celebrating our Covenant Service. This is an annual service where we commit ourselves to God once again recognising the power and presence of God in all things and for all times. There are many powerful words in the Covenant prayer, some of which will resonate more in some years than others. My invitation is that prior to the service we sit with the prayer ahead of praying it. The line 'you are mine and I am yours' emphasises the presence and assurance of Christ in our lives.

Recognising and living that assurance of God's presence should give us confidence to share this message with others. The Covenant prayer is one where we offer ourselves to God to serve God in Christ wherever we are placed. As we continue to find our God-given ways and times of serving in the present and in the times ahead, all we do is for the glory of God. We continue to pray for the guidance of the Holy Spirit to lead us in the ways of service and mission.

Whilst things change and we all need to get used to writing 2024, we do so with the constancy of God, who is with us. Whatever we have faced or whatever might lie ahead we do with God who is with us in Jesus Christ. We can dwell in this and live in the assurance that we will never be on our own. Inevitably, there will be highlights and low points in the coming year, just as there have been in previous years. But in it all, let's remember that 'the best of all is, God is with us' today and in every day to come.

God bless,  
Chris