**10am All Age Parish Communion 29th December 2024**

**Col 3:12-17 (and 1 Sam 1:18-22, 26, Luke 2:41-end)**

**Believing in Christ and living out God’s word, Christians are transformed and grow in love**

It’s the time of year when we hear a lot about New Year’s Resolutions. How many people are thinking about making a New Year’s Resolution? What do you think are the most popular New Year’s Resolutions, according to a recent survey?

1. Exercise more
2. Lose weight / Improve diet
3. Save more money
4. Pursuing a career ambition
5. Quit smoking
6. Decorating/renovating my home
7. Learn a new skill or hobby
8. Cutting down on drinking
9. Volunteering
10. Spending more time with family/friends

It seems to me that we’ve got two types of resolution here:

Some involve making a change, deciding not to do what you’ve been doing before, and doing something different.

**Taking off the old you, and putting on the new you.**

Some involve building on something you’re already doing already, and taking it further.

**Growing in the way that you’d like to grow. Something you already do, that you’d like to do more of.**

Let’s just run through that list again, and see which kind they are:

1. **Exercise more**
2. **Lose weight / Improve diet**
3. **Save more money**
4. **Pursuing a career ambition**
5. **Quit smoking**
6. **Decorating/renovating my home**
7. **Learn a new skill or hobby**
8. **Cutting down on drinking**
9. **Volunteering**
10. **Spending more time with family/friends**

Both our OT reading and our gospel reading are about growth – about being transformed. In our reading from 1 Samuel we heard how ***the boy Samuel*** living with his mentor, Eli, in the Temple in Jerusalem and visited by his parents once a year, ***continued to grow both in stature and in favour with the Lord and with the people***. And in our gospel reading from Luke, we heard about the young Jesus, when he was 12 years old, staying behind after a visit with his parents to Jerusalem, and being found by them ***sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions***. And we heard then how Jesus went, with his parents and was obedient to them, and of ***how Jesus increased in wisdom and in years, and in divine and human favour***.

But it is in our reading from Paul’s letter to the Colossians that we hear how all of us, who are believers, can grow in faith and in practical Christian living. Our reading picks up Paul’s letter right in the middle of Paul’s letter – halfway through Chapter 3. Paul tells us in chapter 2, v6-7 what he thinks is the key to living as Christians. Paul says, in chapter 2, v6-7:

***As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, continue to live your lives in him, rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving***.

And really, we can see how, in the whole of this middle section of chapter 3 that Beth read to us, Paul is riffing on this theme. This is the idea that Christ is not only the way in to living as a Christian, Christ is also the way to go on living as a Christian. We heard Paul tell us this, when he said ***Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts***. It is when we accept Jesus as our Saviour, when we stop desperately trying to keep hold of the controls of our lives, and instead allow Jesus into our lives, that we begin to ***let the peace of Christ rule in [our] hearts***.

Beginning to believe in Christ; starting to see that God sent his Son to us so that we’d know how much God loved us and wanted us to turn to him; that is the beginning of living as a Christian. That is when we realise that ***just as the Lord has forgiven [us], so [we] also must forgive***. It is appreciating being loved ourselves, and forgiven ourselves, that enables us to ***bear with one another and … [to] forgive each other.***

And Paul also tells us, in this letter, about the other, key, thing that enables us to live as a Christian. Paul reminds us that we’re not navigating our way through life as a Christian without a road-map. We have the word of God – the Bible – to help us to understand who God is, and why he loves us so much that he’d send Jesus to make it possible for us to be at one with God again. As Paul says, ***Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly***.

And Paul reminds us that we need to get to know God’s word and to develop our confidence in encouraging and challenging one another to live according to God’s word. That’s what Paul means when he says ***teach and admonish one another in all wisdom***.

Now, are you thinking I would never do that. I would never tell somebody else how to live because of what it says in the Bible. Admonish somebody else? Never.

But ask yourself whether your Christian friend has ever said to you – don’t you know that the Bible says God loves you? That’s your friend taking hold of what it says in the Bible and admonishing you with it.

I wonder whether you have ever said to somebody “Don’t worry, just take it one day at a time”. That’s you, taking what it says in the Bible and admonishing your friend.

That’s the kind of helpful insight and practical conversation that happens, week in and week out, in our homegroups. If you’re not in one of our groups, but you’d like to join one, have a word with one of the clergy or one of the Ministry Team, like Jane or Kate. So it is by believing in Christ, and by living out God’s word, that Christians are transformed and grow in love.

Paul then shows what living as Christian is like, once we let the peace of Christ, and the word of Christ, into our hearts, and into our lives. Instead of us working hard to change ourselves, we find ourselves being changed from within, as the peace of Christ and the word of Christ start to be active in our hearts. When we ***let the peace of Christ rule in [our] hearts***, and when we ***let the word of Christ dwell in [us] richly***, we find that it gets easier and easier to start living like a Christian. Instead of struggling to find within ourselves the Christian virtues like ***compassion, kindness, humility, meekness and patience*** – all fruits of the Holy Spirit – we find that acting with these virtues becomes as easy as getting dressed.

We know that it doesn’t matter what you want to do, you feel much more able to do it if you feel properly dressed for it. Lots of my family are keen on doing Park Runs, so I’ve done two Park Runs in a week. And I can tell you, you wouldn’t do a Park Run without putting on your running kit and running shoes. Whatever it is we’re going to do, we want to be properly dressed to do it. Whether it is old clothes to do the gardening, an apron to do the cooking, or wellies to go jumping around in puddles.

And it is the same with living like a Christian. Since it means a new way of life, it needs a new way of thinking. Paul reminds us that we need to be clothing ourselves with what we need to live in this new way. So that acting with ***compassion, kindness, humility, meekness and patience*** starts to get easier.

And the best thing of all is that we’re given what we need to do this. The Holy Spirit gives us all that we need to live the Christian life: the ***compassion, kindness, humility, meekness and patience*** that we need. It all comes from letting Christ into our lives: the peace of Christ and the word of Christ.

And now, let’s go back to where we began, with New Year’s Resolutions. One of the best New Year Resolutions you could make would be to get to know the Bible better. If you’d like to make that your New Year Resolution, we’ve got various ways to help you with that, at the back of the church.

If you wonder where to start reading the Bible, we’ve got a leaflet with some suggestions for where you might begin. If you’d like to know more about our bible study groups, we’ve got a leaflet about those too.

And if you’d like to take away with you what you’ve heard today, there are a few bookmarks at the back of the church. The bookmarks have a couple of bible verses on them, to help you remember that it is by **Believing in Christ, and living out God’s word, that Christians are transformed and grow in love.**

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