

Sunday am (2 cor 8. 6-9 , John 1. 14-18)

Opening Prayer Gracious Father, thank you for your compassion and mercy, thank you for the gift of Jesus, renew us afresh by your Spirit this morning. AMEN

Intro Good morning and Happy New Year to you all
I hope you've had a joyful and peaceful Christmas and New Year
That you've known God drawing close to you, bringing light and blessing to you, in this challenging season we're all living in.
It's been very different this year, more people have been on their own, family zoom meetings!!!
We're all Adapting to Tier 3 too, but relishing the freedom to meet and worship
A New Year is a natural time to reflect and take stock.
To reflect back on the past year (or 9 months) and learn and clear the decks.....
Making sure the past is put behind you and thinking clearly about what lies ahead

NY Most of us are full of good intentions, want to make a difference, hope for good things for ourselves and others
But our pasts teach us that we can be disappointed, that most of our plans are just that, ours, but what is God speaking to us about, what are God intentions for us this year?
What is God saying to us and asking of us?
If we have learnt nothing from the last year other than how COVID has changed all our plans or that God's people in Exodus needed fresh manna for each new day then we would be doing well

Today is an Opportunity to Rededicate ourselves to God. Why? Because at the beginning of a New Year and after celebrating at Christmas the God who has given us everything we need in Jesus, then that's the most important thing we could do at the beginning of a New Year.

Let me share something that has God has been speaking to me about over the last month or so

A couple of months ago, someone graffitied our wall on Walcot Street with this **"Starmer is a Tory"**

They put it there, because its opposite the Labour Party Offices and someone thought that the greatest insult they could say about the Labour Party leader, Keir Starmer, was that he was a Tory. So someone wrote the curse "Starmer is a Tory" as an insult on our walls. Now this upset me, irritated me, because I don't want St Swithin's to be a house of curses, full of bitterness, judgement, vanity and selfishness but a house of blessing, of goodness, generosity, grace and truth and forgiveness. We're not a church of cursing, but of blessing.

Now on a very regular basis, I get to witness human behaviour at its worst, selfish, mean, small, vindictive, petty, thin, vain and full of self-pity. When we get involved in the messiness of human lives, It's really unattractive, It's ugly. It's human behaviour at its worst and if we're honest we're all capable of it and at times we will have behaved like it, but Christians are not defined by it.

Pass Both of our passages remind us of why at Christmas there is Hope for all of

us/everyone

Creator God who is rich beyond all measure has intervened and given and sent us Jesus

God who was rich beyond measure with all the eternity of heaven to be enjoyed
Left heaven to come to earth, to become a weak fragile baby, to be vulnerable, to be poor

So that we who are weak, sinful, wilful, petty and full of cursing
Can become rich beyond measure? Can be blessed, can be full, can be rich. How good is that?

Is it really possible that God loves you and I that much today, that God would intervene and send his own Son, because he didn't want us lost and helpless in our cursed and weak state?

That God in his mercy wants us to choose a life of blessing with God, enjoying God's riches, enjoying God's benefits, sharing and giving them away to others in the world who really need those riches, those blessings. Now more than ever

Do we believe today in our hearts that if we were the only person on earth, God would still have sent his son to rescue, save, forgive, restore and heal us? Do we believe if we've put our trust in God that all the inheritance of heaven is ours, as God's precious children?

If you've lost your way in 2020, this morning is an opportunity to turn to him in repentance and faith, to renew your trust in God and ask to be forgiven and cleansed again from all unrighteousness. So that we don't live as slaves, cursed and downtrodden, but as Heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, blessed as children of our heavenly Father

This morning, there is hope, there is good news for all of us in Jesus.

You may feel that you have failed so many times before, unworthy of God, unworthy of other Christians, but in the great reading of John 1 that we read again and again at Christmas, that God in Christ has come to us where we are. Nothing we do will earn our acceptance of God, to become a child of the riches of heaven. Only our trust and faith in Jesus coming to us, in vulnerability, full of grace and truth will.

The world really needs people who are longing to bless rather than curse, longing to bring life to others, longing to encounter people who are full of grace and truth. Longing to encounter someone like Jesus.

Can that be us this year? A people, a church longing to bless, longing to act out of grace and truth, forgiving the cursers, taking the curses, the weakness and getting free and getting clean. Restoring them to life?

So Will you respond to God coming amongst us this morning and receive him?
The God of love who comes to you again in Jesus, full of grace and truth, offering you a fresh start
Who will forgive your sins, cleanse you from all unrighteousness
Who will transform your poverty into His riches
Who will turn your rags into his riches, will you welcome him?

As u go from here will you take the grace and truth you have received and share it with others?

Will you give out of the bounteous riches you have received

Will you commit to become a house of God's Blessing and resist Cursing

"God who was rich beyond measure became poor for our sake so that we who were poor could become rich"

Let's Pray.