



St Andrew's



United Reformed Church
Penylan Road, Roath, Cardiff. CF24 3PF

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Weekly newsletter - issue 95

Dear friends,

Here we are celebrating the second week end of Christmas so, let us stop our busy lives for two minutes to think about the Wise Men or the Magi, as they were called. There is no doubt that they were well respected in their culture, and by other cultures too. They had wide ranging knowledge of science, mathematics, history, and astrology; think of people like Stephen Hawking or Brian Cox. In fact, they were probably some of the most powerful advisors across the empires. They weren't kings, but they were people of great importance.

And they were looking for something special, someone very special; and they were looking for answers. Even with all their knowledge,

they still hadn't found the answers they were looking for. They were seekers – seeking something special.

In Jeremiah 29:13, God says: "You will seek Me and find Me, when you search for Me with all your heart."

The Wise Men put everything they had into their search: they committed to such a long journey, and they brought expensive gifts with them. They didn't hold back! And God revealed Himself to them in an amazing way, through the star which guided them to Jesus.

We are told that the wise men stopped at Herod's palace in Jerusalem and listened to what the king said and then left. And the star they had seen in the east went on ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was. They must have been thrilled and excited to see where the star led them. – Matthew 2:9-10. They found exactly what they were looking for – the new King, Jesus.

Surely we wonder what was their response. In the stinking mess of the stable, the wise men knelt down and worshipped Him and they gave Him their gifts.

What is it that we are seeking? Are we looking for answers to difficult questions? Is there a need within us that isn't being fulfilled? Perhaps the things we've found have proved not to be the answer. Like the Wise Men, are we willing to put everything into our search?

Whether we're looking for proof that God loves us or that He even exists, or we're wanting to know Him better, God promises that if we search with all our heart He will reveal Himself to us. And when He does, I pray that your response will be like the Wise Men's was: that

we'll bow down and worship Him, and that we'll give Him all we have. Because when we do He will do something amazing with us and through us.

So, what will our response to Jesus be this coming year? Perhaps when we are searching our response must be like the Wise Men and don't hold anything back!

Amen.

My thanks go to Jill for once again supplying this week's sermon and prayers. We have provided our New Year '***Thoughts and Prayers***' video, which, as always, can be found by holding down the Ctrl button and clicking on the YouTube link: <https://youtu.be/t351JpMwEk8>. The video is also available on St Andrew's, and my Facebook pages.

May God bless and keep you all safe.

Des

Minister - St Andrew's URC Cardiff and Peniel Nelson

SERMON

Philippians 3:13-14

Well it's that time of year again when in a fit of optimism many of us make great promises to ourselves about what we are going to do in the New Year - many we usually abandon about the second week in January. Let's be honest now. How many of you kept to the diet? How many of you actually kept exercising past February? I want to challenge you to make 4 new commitments for this New Year.

Here they are

1: COMMIT YOURSELF TO FORGET YOUR FAILURES

Philippians 3:13-14 tells us, "***Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.***"

That advice has stood the test of time. I don't know of any more relevant and practical advice for us at the start of 2022. We don't have to live our lives imprisoned by our past. All of us have failed in some way in our lives over the last year. Probably we won't see our failures recorded for history on TV, but they are recorded in our hearts and minds. For many of us our failures are painful memories. Maybe for you it is a memory of how you failed in a relationship. You made the wrong decisions, said, and did the wrong things and the relationship ended.

Some parents probably know that they failed their children in some way, some children are aware that they have failed their parents. It's more than likely that many of us know that we have failed ourselves in some ways and all of us should know that in some way we have failed God.

What St Paul is saying is that we must not allow ourselves to be bogged down by our past failures and that we should not dwell on our past so much that it stops us from moving forward into the future that God has for us.

I think that the start of the New Year is a good time to rise to that challenge and say, "***With the help of God, I am going to forget***

my past. I am going to stop torturing myself about what I did or didn't do. The New Year is a good time to stop being chained to past failures. God is saying that he doesn't want you to go through your life branding yourself as a failure. Jesus Christ died on the Cross of Calvary so that we could be forgiven. When we become Christians that forgiveness becomes a reality in our lives. When we have received Christ's forgiveness it allows us to forgive ourselves and forget our failures. Perhaps you need to accept Jesus' forgiveness and then forgive yourself.

2: COMMIT YOURSELF TO GIVE UP YOUR GRUDGES

Colossians 3:13 says, "***Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye.***"

God is challenging us directly and personally to give up our grudges. That is what he means when he says forgive each other whatever quarrels you may have against one another. A grudge is a deep ongoing resentment that we cultivate in our hearts against someone else. A grudge is an unforgiving spirit that leads to unforgiving attitudes and unforgiving actions. Now I know you know what I am talking about. Harboring a grudge is about nursing a dislike for someone. Grudges are dangerous because they are destructive. Grudges destroy marriages. Grudges break up families. Grudges ruin friendships. Grudges split churches.

Let's be honest enough to admit that one of the problems of the Church in general is the grudges that Christians hold against one

another. If you know you are holding a grudge against someone then God says, **"give it up."** Grudges are not just destructive they are also self-destructive. When you hold a grudge against someone you will hurt yourself as much and perhaps more than you will hurt the person you are holding it against. Make no mistake about it, if you keep harbouring a grudge then it will eventually destroy you, if not physically, certainly emotionally and spiritually. It will make you a bitter and twisted person.

Chapter 21 in the Book of Job describes people who **"Have no happiness at all, they live and die with bitter hearts."** Do you want that to be the way you are remembered?

Remember the parable that Jesus told about the servant who was forgiven a huge debt by the king and then refused to forgive someone else a tiny amount? Jesus said his unforgiving spirit landed him in prison. Unforgiving servants always end up in prisons of anger guilt and depression. God says, **'set yourself free; Give up your grudges; Forgive each other whatever you may have against one another.'**

According to the Bible the way to give up a grudge is to forgive. It's that simple. God isn't asking us to ignore whatever the person has done to us. He isn't asking us to pretend it didn't happen. He doesn't ask us to condone it or to pretend it didn't matter. What God asks us to do is to forgive the grievance. That means to acknowledge how wrong and painful what was done to us was but to decide to forgive person who did the wrong to us.

I am absolutely certain that there are people who need to give up their grudges and forgive the grievances they have against someone else. God says that the deep-seated resentment we have against that

person has to go. What better time to make that difficult decision to forgive than the start of a new year?

Now don't tell God you can't forgive, because what you really mean is that you won't forgive. If Christ can forgive you our sin despite it costing Him the pain of the cross then surely we can give up the grievance we have with someone else? The question is will we do it?

3: COMMIT YOURSELF TO RESTORE YOUR RELATIONSHIPS

Those of you familiar with computers know that when you turn it on a little window pops up asking whether you want to run a check to see if all the programmes are working properly. God issues a very similar invitation. It is the invitation not to check to see if our computer software is working properly but to check whether our personal relationships are working properly.

The Lord issues that challenge in Romans 12:18, **'If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men.'** The important phrase there is, as much as it lieth in you. By using that phrase God is personally challenging each one of us to do all we can to restore our relationships.

Some relationships might have gone wrong in our lives because of what other people have done and they might well not want that relationship restored. God recognises that. That is why he starts by saying **"If it is possible."** But let's be honest some of our relationships have gone wrong because of what we have done.

When God's word says, **"as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone,"** it is saying if you have caused a rift in a relationship then you have a responsibility to do everything you can to restore it.

That everything includes the one thing we all probably find most difficult, asking for forgiveness.

I am sure that I am not the only person who finds it hardest to say "**I am sorry**" to the people I am closest too. I wonder how many relationships are not all they should be or could be simply because someone won't say "**I was wrong, I am sorry, will you forgive me?**" I am certain that some of us need to ask forgiveness for harsh words and cutting remarks that have really wounded others over the years. Maybe God is saying that this change of year is the right time to restore the relationships you have ruined by going and saying that you are truly sorry for those angry words or those selfish and thoughtless actions.

Make no mistake it will be hard to do; but one of the most significant things that you can do to mark the New Year is not set off a firework but to admit your past errors in relationships and humbly seek forgiveness from the ones you have hurt. Will you rise to that challenge and make a commitment to restore your broken relationships in this new year ?

4: COMMIT YOURSELF TO TURN YOUR BACK ON YOUR TRANSGRESSIONS.

After the American Civil War was over and the slaves had been set free many slaves decided to stay with their former master and continue to do what they were told. They had been set free, but they chose to live as slaves. The New Testament says that is exactly how many Christians choose to live.

Christ died to set us free, the Holy Spirit has given us the power to be free, but just like those former slaves many Christians still choose to

obey their old master, sin. We read in Romans 6:12, "***Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof.***"

That is the last challenge that I believe will make this New Year truly significant for you. When God says for us to not let sin control the way we live and to not give in to its desires He is issuing the challenge to turn our backs on our transgressions.

Christian writers used to talk about something called besetting sins. What they meant by besetting sins were particular sins that a particular Christian was prone to doing time and time again. Many of us end up choosing to give into our besetting sins and end up living double lives. We give into that sin time after time and then become overcome with guilt constantly defeated by the same old sin. Too many people's attitude to their besetting sin is that they won't do anything about it and just learn to live with it. Is your spiritual life compromised because you have learned to live with a besetting sin? God challenges us to turn our back on that sin- whatever it is.

To stop letting it control the way we live.

To stop giving in to it.

God says you are no longer a slave to sin so don't live or act like one. If you ask God's forgiveness for your sin and for his power to resist that sin then this new year can be a new era in your spiritual life. It all boils down to this: Will this New Year be just a calendar changing event for you or are you willing to rise to these challenges from God's word and make these commitments and make it a life changing event?

Are you willing to make these 4 commitments for 2022?

Will you commit yourself to forget your failures?
Will you commit yourself to give up your grudges?
Will you commit yourself to restore your relationships?
Will you commit yourself to turning your back on your transgressions?

This New Year will really be something to celebrate if you'll keep forgiveness at the heart of what you do. Have the courage right now

To forgive yourself and "forget the past"

To forgive others who have hurt you "and forgive whatever grievances you have"

To ask for forgiveness from those you have hurt and "as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone"

To ask for God's forgiveness and "No longer be a slave to sin"

With God's help you can do all these things in 2022.

Amen

PRAYERS

In this New Year let your light shine. God of all creation, you hold the depths of the earth in your hands. You are closer to us than the air we breathe. Fill our souls with your wonderful love and light. Give us strength and courage to reflect that love and light in the world. Let us never shrink back from who we are in you or hide our light inside ourselves. Renew in us a sense of joy, painting the dark shadows around us with your light, your love and your salvation. Hear us today as we pray for a world too often darkened by hatred, evil, power, and greed. Within our darkest night, Let your light shine.

God of power and might, your broken world cries out from the depths, a world dominated by the darkness of war, terror, pain, and suffering. We think of the many on-going and deepening conflicts in the world, and we share the pain and anguish of those who have had to flee from their homes, countries, and livelihoods. We pray for those who risk their lives, desperate for a new start free from fear and war. May they see your light, feel your strength, and power and know the truth of your promise that we shall not be overcome by the dark shadows of life or the darkness of human nature. Within our darkest night, Let your light shine.

God of compassion and grace, we share with you our love and concern for people in a dark place today. We have on our hearts the friends and loved ones of the victims of violence and hatred. We pray that they will find your strength in the compassion and love of those around them. We pray for tolerance in our society. Let your light shine through the darkness of all their pain and their suffering. Within our darkest night, Let your light shine.

God of life, we ask for your healing power on those who are enduring pain and illness. We share the grief of people close to us, who've recently lost loved ones. We remember that as we weep with the grieving, we embrace the joy of those whose prayers have been answered. We know your everlasting light shines with us, in moments of great sadness and great joy. Within our darkest night, Let your light shine.

God of love and hope, Renew in us a deeper sense of who we are in you. Help us to be aware of your presence each and every day. Make us instruments of love and praise. May our words, actions and lives be living examples of your forgiving, healing, life-giving love. ***Amen.***