

New Year – New Beginning

John 1 1-9

Background

Good Morning and a Happy New Year to all of you.

New Year is traditionally a time for both looking back and looking forward. Last year for a lot of us was not a good one. For many, it has been a time of grieving, sadness and a Christmas marked more by separation than coming together. As a result, I've had more time to watch films on TV. One of my favourite films on over Christmas was Forest Gump and there is scene in that where Jenny, his girlfriend, finds herself back at her now-abandoned family home. She is recalling where she was abused as a child, and starts to throw stones at it, to seek to destroy it, to erase the bad memories. As Forest says, *'sometimes I guess, there just aren't enough rocks'*. It's felt much like that when I think of 2020. *Sometimes there just aren't enough rocks.....*Perhaps it gives us an insight into how some of the Psalmists felt in exile (by the Rivers of Babylon we sat and wept when we remembered Zion) There is nothing wrong with lamenting what we have lost.....

But another film that was on was 'It's a wonderful life'. The main character, George Bailey, who runs the local building society, is facing potential bankruptcy, contemplating suicide and wishing he'd never been born. Then he is given an insight by his guardian angel into what life for his local town of Bedford Falls would have been like had he never been born. He comes to see what a positive impact his humble day to day actions of helping people buy their own homes has had on the lives of the residents of the town. (He may not know it, but he embodies the prophet's call to Act justly, Love mercy, and Walk humbly with your God). Looking back can also help us put things into perspective, to realise that there is good news, to be thankful for. You only need to read some of the messages chalked onto the boards outside the post office.

The Apostle John also starts his Gospel with looking back.....not just over the past year, but right back to creation. 'In the beginning was the Word' – deliberately echoes the opening lines of Genesis, where the first thing that was created was light, shining in the darkness.....'God saw that the light was good.' John's Gospel (Gospel means Good News) is sometimes called the Gospel of Life because, as he says towards the end of his book – *'These things are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, and that by believing, you may have life in his name'*. The Good News for Life is all about Jesus, but John starts by looking back, putting things in context, placing Jesus with God, working together right at the outset, bringing light into creation. John realised that if you want to know who God is, Jesus is the key. He was there in creation; he was there at the nativity – the clue is in the name - Emmanuel, God with us – he was there at the crucifixion and resurrection - and will be there

in the future. The same yesterday, today and forever. Constant and unchanging in his desire to see light brought into darkness, creation made alive, to help us live life to the full.

To John, that was crucial – he recognised that Jesus was pivotal to life, to life in all its fullness. *‘In him was life and that life was the light of mankind that shines in the darkness’*.

He knew that the way Jesus lived was the illumination that we all need. Just ask the Queen, who in her Christmas Day broadcast said that *‘The teachings of Christ have served as my inner light.’* In his Gospel, John shows us a Jesus who befriends the outcasts; listens to those asking for healing, feeds the hungry, gives sight to the blind and raises the dead to new life. Who demonstrates that putting love into action is the key to fullness of life, and invites us to follow him and enjoy the best wine. Now that is Good News for the start of any year.

When we look back as a church over the last two years, we had as our theme in 2019 ‘You are loved’ and then in 2020 ‘Hope is Here’. Many of those messages of thankfulness on the chalk board in the town centre were expressing thanks for family, for friends – for the support of their loved ones. People still need to know that they are loved, that there is still hope. (It’s what Devizes Covid 19 response was all about, its why we as a church have invested in the SJC and Love Devizes). The writer of the Gospel of Life talks about John the Baptist coming as a witness to testify concerning that light. To point people to Jesus who shows us what God is like. That baton is now passed to us. The darkness is still with us. We need to continue to testify that the real hope, values and perspective for the year ahead are found in the one who creates the light in the darkness, who offers life in all its fullness to us all. Who helps us to discover our true identities and purpose and fills us with his Spirit.

It falls on us to be the Forest Gumps’ sitting alongside the broken hearted Jenny; or the George Bailey’s in whatever sphere we find ourselves in. At home, at work, or as many of us are, working from home – to demonstrate what faith, hope and love look like in practice. To be the light that shines in the darkness. To be the bringers of Good News.

Amen