

I'm about to do a Rev I M Jolly with the opening of this sermon: This for many is the most miserable time of the year, the celebrations of Christmas and New Year are over. The decorations are down, the weather is damp and miserable and summer holidays seem so far away. The January sales have finished and the mornings are cold and dark and evening starts around 4.00pm. Let's face it, this is a rubbish time of year! Yet, despite this, we still have something to celebrate because we belong to Christ which is something worth celebrating. We can celebrate coming together with our sisters and brothers in Christ each week and we have our activities like the Guild, our Bible Study, our Thursday Café and our Café Church which have all started up. We don't celebrate enough in the church, which may be one reason we have difficulty attracting people. Perhaps if we had an attitude of celebrating being the people of God, we may be more attractive and that would lead us to attracting others.

But before we break open the party hats we should acknowledge that celebrations are not something new to the Church, although sometimes to look at us you wouldn't know that! We celebrate Christmas, Easter, Pentecost and Harvest as the major church festivals. Much of our praise is expressed in the form of celebrating what God has done for us: *Jesus, we celebrate your victory. Come on and celebrate, Come and join the celebration* to name but three: I am sure you can think of more yourself. Many of our hymns and praise songs deal with celebration! However, could it be that in recent years, with reports of a church in decline and Christianity being marginalized in society, that we should ask the question: **Have we lost the heart to celebrate? Have we lost the enthusiasm to celebrate Christ?**

We don't appear to have difficulty is celebrating outside of church. I imagine we all celebrate our birthday's although I can tell you that this is less popular with the older one becomes! We celebrate success at sporting events and we celebrate good news and success stories, we celebrate in many ways. So why do we become constrained and find it difficult to celebrate in the Church. After all the church is the place where we are expressing the very thing on which our whole eternal existence is built on: Our salvation through Jesus Christ! So it's time to celebrate and let us thank God for this opportunity to celebrate being the Church of Jesus Christ at this time in our history. Let's strive to be a 21<sup>st</sup> century church that shares our Christian faith in ways that are relevant and challenging. Let us give thanks and reflect on what God has allowed us to do as a church. (*Go round the congregation and ask them to name one thing we can celebrate as a church*). God has enabled and equipped us to do so much in His name and that's good reason to celebrate.

As people of this congregation, you can identify with all that has gone on in the past and what's happening now, and hopefully you'll have a vision for what is still to come as we look forward to the plans God has for Thornliebank in the future. I found myself thinking over the past couple of years recently and I am so thankful for the people of Thornliebank and the gifted people in the congregation who work for tirelessly for God. It's because of these gifted people that I can say with confidence that God has a bright future for Thornliebank. But then there are some who allow themselves to be fooled into thinking that they don't have talent and that they don't have anything to offer. This is a lie of the devil because we are all gifted, and all have our part to play in the body of Christ; the Church. In 2017, we'll need to be ready to recommit ourselves to serving the Lord and each other. This will mean taking risks and making the changes that will be required. It will mean stepping out in faith to serve the Lord. It will mean embracing change and encountering the unknown.

If there is one thing we can be sure of in our church, it is constant change. This morning's scripture from Colossians chapter one is helpful because it reminds us that whatever we are doing together as the church: Planning outreach, offering worship, or gathering together socially: *We are at our very best when our plans and preparations point the way to Christ.* Let me rephrase that: *We are only truly the church when we point the way to Christ.*

It's this expression of church that is described by The Apostle Paul in his letter to the Colossians chapter one. The church at Colossae was a community of believers who lived in the light of Jesus. Jesus had influenced the Colossians in every part of their lives and verses 15 to 18 tells us that Jesus is *the image of God, the God of creation.* He holds all things together and He is the head of the Church. Verse 20 reminds us of Christ's sacrificial death on the cross and of the peace that Jesus' death has won for us. The personal implications of these verses are quite clear: Christian believers live as followers of Christ Jesus, who is King of all creation. He is influential in all of life. Yet despite His majesty Jesus isn't remote from us for He came to serve us. This is the great paradox of our God: *He is both our servant and King.* That's why we sing of our Servant King.

These words from Colossians one are appropriate for today! People are searching for a meaning to life, for purpose and fulfilment in their existence. Many are turning to alternative lifestyles, embracing new age philosophies and self-help programmes. So many people are hung up on the latest self-improvement regime. And none of these remedies give complete answers to life's questions. What scripture and the church offers is the certainty of God and our salvation through His Son. We have this good news to offer people as they seek to discover the important answers to the mysteries of life.

We can't say exactly what the issues the people of Colossae were wrestling with, but we see from these verses that Paul is very keen to remind them of all they have learned. Paul teaches of a life which is totally influenced by Jesus. With this reminder in Paul's letter, the Colossians could go on with confidence of their faith in Christ.

We are told that in this post-modern society, that the church has lost its relevance. We're told that the church no longer has a place in society because people have lost interest in it. This may be true to a point and we are trying to discover why the Church has lost relevance for some. I think our expectation that people will come to church automatically is over and our job is to take church out to our community. And when we talk and listen to people I wonder what they will say in response to Jesus? Have they dismissed Him or do they want to embrace Him? I think we already know the answer!

People are increasingly searching for a meaning to their existence, seeking to find some reason for their daily lives. People still need answers to the big questions in life, and even those who don't confess any particular faith will still have a knowledge of Jesus. They will know that Jesus was born at Christmas. They will be aware of the meaning of Easter is acknowledged as a celebration of Christ's crucifixion and resurrection. It never ceases to amaze me that when people are faced with a crisis they will admit to praying to God. People without faith who have endured hard times will still ask *why is God doing this to me?* Many people outside the church still celebrate Christian festivals and express belief in God as a guiding influence in their lives. So while the Church may have fallen off the radar for many people, Jesus Christ has not. Jesus is not considered irrelevant in today's society. There is still an interest in the Christian God: The same Christ that Paul describes to the church at Colossae.

As we talk with people and as we listen to their stories and attempt to answer their questions about life and the place of God in their lives; they in turn will listen to **our** stories of celebration. They will listen as we tell of all that Jesus has done for us and in us. And they will listen because the stories of God's transforming ordinary lives is interesting. But we need to bold and be willing to risk sharing our stories with others. We worship a King who has given us a command. *Matthew 28: I have been given all authority in heaven and on earth. Go, then, to all peoples everywhere and make them my disciples: baptize them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, and teach them to obey everything I have commanded you. And I will be with you always, to the end of the age.* As we begin 2017, let us remember that we worship the Servant King, who in turn calls us to serve Him. We worship God who has blessed us and has called us to be Church in our time and place, in and out of this building. Let us take church out to our community in 2017 and let us serve Him in this place. **Amen**

*Let us pray* : Lord we thank you for our church and the salvation you have brought to us through our Lord Jesus Christ. We ask that you give us the inspiration, the courage and conviction to bring the Church of Christ into our Community. May the building of God's Kingdom be a reality in Thornliebank; in Jesus name. **Amen.**