

New Year 2022 Message

So folks, a New Year is upon us again. And it's usually the case, is it not?; that this time of year tends to make us reflect on what has gone before, the year past, its highs and lows, don't know whether 2021 was a good or bad year for you ? But the important thing about every New Year is; it has potential to bring **renewed hope** for the future and beyond.

And that's one of the great things about our faith (if not the greatest thing) is the hope that Christianity brings, it deals **firstly with our past**; 2 Corinthians 5:17 *“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come”*

Secondly it gives us strength for the ‘here and now’: Luke 12:7 *“indeed, the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Don't be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows”*.

But more than anything else, our faith gives us **‘hope for the future’** *“For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the LORD, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future”* (Jeremiah 29:11)

And so, as I was thinking & praying over the Christmas period about what God might be saying to us as a church (and perhaps as individuals as well) and to that end I have 3 scriptures to share with you, I believe they are for us at this time, so could I ask you to pray fully consider and also test what I say this morning.

These scriptures came to me over a number of days, one after another, and in the sequence I will share them with you.

As a context, I'm trying to read through 'The Bible in a year' using a Bible planner (which I know some of you are doing) and firstly can I encourage you to read the scriptures on a regular basis, make it a priority in your life in 2022, whether you feel like it or not.

It is such an important thing, to allow the word of God to penetrate your soul and it is also the most frequent way God speaks to us & guides us in our Christian walk.

It was through these readings these scriptures came to me but it was only as I was putting this message together that I found these passages were all interconnected, they all have a common theme, an agricultural setting, they are all about specifically; **a tree and the fruit it bears**.

Firstly John 15; 1-8

“I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. ² Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away; and every *branch* that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit. ³ You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to

you. ⁴ Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me.

⁵“I am the vine, you *are* the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing. ⁶ If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered; and they gather them and throw *them* into the fire, and they are burned. ⁷ If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you. ⁸ By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples”

I must admit, when I first read these verses I was a little bit discouraged! Thinking in the natural, and saying to myself; ‘where is the fruit Lord? In my life, personally and here at CBC’. But scriptures never bring discouragement.

They **will** bring conviction often, areas in our lives we need to put right with God, or things we should or should not be doing, and it is certainly right to ‘take stock at times’ ‘examine ourselves’ let the word of God ‘sift us’ ‘challenge us’. And it is right to ask questions, like; is my theology right? Am I really submitted to your word, am I doing things out of love? Am I on the right path with you Lord?

But we have a loving Father who wants to encourage us not discourage us through His word and wants only the best for us.

There is so much in this reading from John 15 and at this point I don’t want to go into too much depth (as I am apt to do) but just bring out **one truth**, which I believe is applicable to us all, so as I dwelt on these verses, the thing that jumped out at me was; this word ‘**ABIDE**’ 7 times it occurs in our passage.

In essence Jesus tells us this ‘abiding & the bearing of fruit’ He is talking about **is conditional!** - 2 things have to happen, they are linked together like Siamese twins joined at the hip, and no fruit can occur, it goes further than that! we cannot do anything for God, unless this connection takes place and continues to take place.

It’s as important as life itself, and it always takes 2 elements to create physical life; sperm and the egg. And there are 2 elements in our spiritual life that have to be maintained to produce life and enable us to bear fruit and that is;

We abide in Him He abides in us.

It goes back to what Christianity is all about - a relationship - a deep ‘knowing’ of another, in this instance ‘Him, God in us and we in Him. Together and connected, inseparable for eternity.

It's all about a 'love relationship' – 'we Love Him because He first loved us'. If we are not communing with Him, abiding in Him, and the original meaning of the word 'Abide' means; **'not to depart, not to leave, to continue to be present:**

The truth is; He is continually present with us, 'He will never leave us or forsake us' but the question is; are we continually present with Him? Are we abiding / remaining in Him? **It's our choice.**

Our relationship with Jesus is the most important thing – 'seek his kingdom and his righteousness and all these things will be added to you' Matt: 6 say's.

Everything else will flow from this.

That the first thing I want to say for 2022, are you abiding in Him? Do anything you can to build that relationship, Abide in Him above anything else in your life, cut off or let God prune from your branch anything that gets in the way of that.

We will only grow as a Church as we grow as individuals in Christ, and nurture our relationship to God.

When I came to our 2nd passage of scripture, I read this directly after I had read John 15 and was thinking about 'how little fruit I'd seen', but this put a new perspective on things for me.

Habakkuk 3 17-18

“Though the fig tree does not bud
and there are no grapes on the vines,
though the olive crop fails
and the fields produce no food,
though there are no sheep in the pen
and no cattle in the stalls,
¹⁸yet I will rejoice in the LORD,
I will be joyful in God my Saviour”.

What a beautiful passage – what challenging verses!

There are times in our lives; seasons even, when things don't go as planned, we don't see the 'fruit' we were hoping for.

It is so easy to look in a 'natural way' at things and not 'see spiritually' what's going on, but in essence we 'live by faith not by sight' and I think there are times of drought & famine where God withholds things, just to see us persevere, to 'dig our heels in', to 'believe' and don't give up.

Perseverance is one of the greatest attributes in the Christian Life.

1 Peter 1:6 says; “In all this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials”.

Job said ‘even though He slays me, yet will I hope in Him’.

And there are times when we have to just ‘praise God’ even when we don’t feel like it or circumstances seem to say otherwise.

So that’s the second thing for 2022 ‘don’t look too much in the natural’ or be concerned that nothing appears to be happening in your life, at church ‘that nothing is changing’ just keep doing the faithful things, look to Jesus and ‘rejoice in Him’ when you do that it changes your perspective on things.

And thirdly and finally the last scripture I want to share with you is Luke 13:6-9;

“Then he told this parable: “A man had a fig tree growing in his vineyard, and he went to look for fruit on it but did not find any.⁷ So he said to the man who took care of the vineyard, ‘For three years now I’ve been coming to look for fruit on this fig tree and haven’t found any. Cut it down! Why should it use up the soil?’

‘Sir,’ the man replied, ‘leave it alone for one more year, and I’ll dig around it and fertilize it. If it bears fruit next year, fine! If not, then cut it down.’”

I love this parable; it’s about not giving up! – about persisting with something that appears a lost cause, dead and buried, what was it that man said about CBC? ‘Dead on their feet’ well were ‘not dead yet’!! I think this story is particularly relevant for CBC in 2022.

I was saying to Dave last week, we seem to be doing the right things, praying, preaching the word, knocking on doors, praying specifically for breakthroughs, but we haven’t seen them yet! As we said earlier. I would like to believe the tide will turn in 2022.

But the sense I have is; to give it ‘**one more year**’ - now that doesn’t mean we close down the church if no fruit appears in 2022, who knows, God may say something different to us next year.

But what I think it does mean is; **to give it our best shot in 2022**, don’t give up, to fertilize the ground around the CBC tree this next year. It’s often darkest before the dawn.

Did you notice what the man said to the Vineyard owner about the struggling tree ‘let me dig around it and **fertilize it**’? The purpose of fertiliser is to ensure their healthy growth; plants need vitamins and minerals to thrive. They need essential nutrients, which they can get through fertilizers.

So how do we feed the nutrients to the CBC tree? Well we continue to do the things we were doing but with a greater focus, with a greater diligence and care. You see the Gardner in

our story was now focusing on the one tree; he now has a 'vested interest' in seeing this tree bear fruit.

We must do the same, all do our part in the fertilisation of the ground, and we are all workers in the vineyard. Can I ask you prayerfully how you may contribute this year to the 'fruit' I believe God wants to bring in 2022 at CBC?

One of the key areas is **prayer** and we will be opening up the Thursday prayer meeting again from 8.00pm this Thursday, we have also 'courted the idea' of having the church open up for prayer every morning for an hour during the week. Please pray about that.

In line with our scriptures, using an agricultural term we have to 'put our hand to the plough' in 2022. So in **conclusion** these are the 3 things I believe God is saying to us at the start of this New Year;-

Firstly to 'Abide in Him' a body is only as strong as its individual members, if your are 'abiding in the Lord', putting Him first in everything you do, He will Abide in you and then we will all be stronger together. Everything else flows from that - So make it a goal a priority to seek His 'Kingdom His Righteousness' to be found always 'abiding in Him' this year above everything else.

Secondly make the choice to 'Rejoice in the Lord' to be 'joyful in God your Saviour' even when things don't seem to be going as you thought they would, in your personal life or at church – even when as our verses say ;

(The) the fig tree does not bud
and there are no grapes on the vines,
(or) the olive crop fails
the fields produce no food,
(or) there are no sheep in the pen
and no cattle in the stalls,

See things through a 'spiritual lens', rather than your own natural eyesight and look to Him and if you do He will be mightily pleased with you, because that's 'walking in faith'.

Thirdly and finally, let us do everything to 'fertilise' the ground here at CBC who knows 2022 maybe our best year, it may be our last year! But let it not be for any lack on our part.

Let's' be 'busy about our masters business' so when He comes He will find us faithful - let's take the promise of Galatians 6:9 to heart; "Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up"

Amen.

Tony Troy (02.01.2022)