

# **ST. ANDREW'S, BLACKROCK & BRAY - 3RD JANUARY 2021**

## **NEW YEAR'S SERVICE (JEREMIAH 17:5-8)**

### **Welcome and Announcements**

*"Happy New Year! Welcome to our first 'Church at Home' transcript for 2021." - Rev. Andrew Gill*

### **Call to Worship – Psalm 60:1-3**

*Arise, shine, for your light has come,  
and the glory of the Lord rises upon you.*

*See, darkness covers the earth  
and thick darkness is over the peoples,  
but the Lord rises upon you  
and his glory appears over you.*

*Nations will come to your light,  
and kings to the brightness of your dawn.*

### **Prayer for the New Year**

Father God,  
this new year, I give you my thanks, I give you my praise, I give you my  
worship, I receive your all-embracing love deep within my heart, and I  
respond with love towards you.

God of new beginnings,

Help me in this new year to love you with all of my heart, love you with all of  
my soul, love you with all of my strength, love you with all of my mind.

Lord of time,

Increase my hunger for your word, and help me to keep my eyes on you. In my weakness Father, make me strong; and guide my thoughts to be more like Yours.

This year give me an attitude that is more like Christ: to offer kindness; to bring peace; to spread joy; and to share generously with everyone I meet. I thank you for the gifts and abilities you have given to the people of my church. May we choose to use them in your service.

Lord Jesus,

may your light shine before me.

In your name I pray, Amen.

### **Reading - Jeremiah 17:5-8**

*This is what the Lord says:*

*“Cursed is the one who trusts in man,  
who draws strength from mere flesh  
and whose heart turns away from the Lord.*

*That person will be like a bush in the wastelands;  
they will not see prosperity when it comes.*

*They will dwell in the parched places of the desert,  
in a salt land where no one lives.*

*“But blessed is the one who trusts in the Lord,  
whose confidence is in him.*

*They will be like a tree planted by the water  
that sends out its roots by the stream.*

*It does not fear when heat comes;  
its leaves are always green.  
It has no worries in a year of drought  
and never fails to bear fruit."*

### **Sermon - 'Starting the New Year with Confidence'**

Normally at the beginning of a new year we are filled with excitement as we think about all the possibilities that lie ahead. We make resolutions, set goals, and think about all that is going to happen. But probably this year things are a little bit more cautious. We've seen just how unpredictable life can really be, and we know that we don't know exactly what is going to happen this year, except that it's starting off with more lockdown and restrictions. I think a lot of us are asking the question, 'will this year be any better than last year?'

What I wanted to do this morning is to look at a few verses in Jeremiah chapter 17, where the prophet describes two different types of people, who will both experience a difficult year. The first one sees no success and has a terrible year, but the other one sees prosperity and blessing. What is the difference between these two people? It's that the second one puts their trust in God.

We can't control the circumstances of the year ahead but we can choose who we put our confidence in. So who are you going to trust in 2021? Are you going to put your confidence in yourself? In your own strength, abilities, or discipline to achieve your goals? Are you going to put your trust in other people, whether they are world leaders, or family members? Are you putting all your hope in the vaccine? Or are you actually not trusting at all? Maybe you are entering into this year with fear and anxiety, and with no confidence at all?

In Jeremiah chapter 17 verses 5 to 6 the prophet warns people about trusting in themselves, or in anything else other than God. *“Cursed is the one who trusts in man who draws strength from mere flesh, and whose heart turns away from the Lord. That person will be like a bush in the wastelands, they will not see prosperity when it comes. They will dwell in the parched places of the desert, in assault land where no one lives.”*

I wonder if your Christmas tree is still up. Maybe you are a traditionalist and you like to leave it up to the 6th of January every year. Or maybe you like to get rid of it quickly and it goes with the wrapping paper on St. Stephen's Day. Julie and I got a real Christmas tree this year, and we loved it. It was big, bushy, and smelled great. Julie did a wonderful job decorating it, and we loved looking at it all through Christmas. But it's probably going to go later on today, because even if we wanted to keep it up, already you can see that its life is starting to fade. The smell is lessening, the branches are beginning to brown and droop, and it has become very dry. As time goes on it is going to get more and more lifeless. Why? Because it's got no roots! It's been chopped off. It has no source of life other than itself.

It's a little bit like what Jeremiah is talking about in this passage about somebody who trusts in themselves. Now, he didn't know what a Christmas tree was, so he used a more familiar picture to him of a bush in a desert. This is a picture of somebody who is self-reliant, or who has misplaced trust. There's no rain, the ground is dry, the area is desolate, and it is a picture of hopelessness. You know, so often we put our focus on the wrong things. Like a Christmas tree, we focus on the eternal decorations, but neglect our roots. In 2021, don't make the priority growing your money or your muscles, or gaining new skills or success. Focus on the things that will supply you with what you need when life gets difficult.

If we want a blessed life in 2021, then we don't put confidence in ourselves. We need to trust in God. *"Blessed is the one who trusts in the Lord, whose confidence is in him. They will be like a tree planted by the water that sends out its roots by the stream. It does not fear when heat comes, its leaves are always green. It has no worries in a year of drought and never fails to bear fruit."* (vv.7-8) This image is such a contrast to the other one. This tree has got deep roots that go in to a stream. It's full of life, and fruit, and it has everything it needs to keep growing, no matter what conditions are around it.

Last year was a bit of a drought year, it was horrible for everyone and I know for some of you in particular it was very difficult. For me, I had to cancel my wedding and postpone my marriage. I had to close the church for months on end. There was no certainty, and there were new challenges every other day. It was a difficult time, but as I look back, my overriding sense is that of thankfulness. I saw God's blessing, and I experienced his goodness. Even in the lowest points of lockdown, through my roots of faith, I was provided with a constant supply of hope, a sense of peace, and a deep down joy.

We don't know what these next few months may bring, but if our confidence is in Christ, then we are like a tree by a stream and we will have a source of everything that we need. Colossians 2:6-7 says this, *"So then just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live your lives in him rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught and overflowing with thankfulness."* If you put your confidence in Christ this year, if you say that 2021 is going to be a year of trusting in God, then these verses remind us that we will have a steady flow of love throughout our year. We will be assured of our identity as sons and daughters of the King, we will have a sense of purpose and meaning in our life, we will have a fresh supply of the grace that we need to face whatever it is that comes our way. And we will never be without hope for the future. So let us put our roots deep into Christ.

Let me suggest two practical ways that you can do that. First of all, don't give up on church. I know these transcripts are a poor substitute for the real thing, but while it's our only option we need to persevere with it. Hearing the preaching of God's word, worshipping him, and having fellowship with each other, in whatever form it takes, is so important to maintain our roots. Church is so important, so don't give up on it this year.

Secondly, read the Bible every day. For most of last year I put out daily reading plans that give you a couple of verses to read and think about each day. Can I encourage you to decide that every day in January you're will make some time to read God's word. (I've included a copy of the reading plan with this letter.) This year we don't know what's ahead, but we know that if our confidence is in Christ, we will have all we need.

### **Prayer**

Father God,  
Thank you for all your faithfulness and goodness  
towards me in this last year.  
Thank you for this new year,  
and this new opportunity to trust in you.

Lord, I am sorry for the times that I have turned my heart away from you  
and put my trust in other things. Please forgive me.

Today I put my confidence in Christ.

Holy Spirt,  
help me to grow deep roots into living waters.  
May the love of God flow in me,  
and through me. Amen