

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

I recently went away on retreat, as I do each autumn, in order to seek the Lord. My intention is always to pray, to walk and pray, to read and pray and spend time listening to what the Lord might be asking of me as your minister, and of us as His church. At last years retreat I came away with a sense that for 2023 the Lord was calling GMC to 'wait upon Him', as I have mentioned in previous pastoral letters.

This year I have left with the sense we are being asked to say together as a church, 'Lord, I trust in Your unending mercy'. As I read my daily devotions from the app, 'Bible in One Year' as Nicky Gumbel addressed Hebrews 3.v1-19 I was struck by what he said which I quote in full...

At the heart of sin is unbelief. Ever since the Garden of Eden, the deceitfulness of sin has caused us to doubt God's goodness, His love for us, and His word—'Did God really say? (Gen 3.v1); 'You will surely not die' (Gen 3.v4). You always swallow a lie about God before you swallow forbidden fruit. For us today it is the same. If we really believed God's love for us, His goodness and His word, then we would not fall for sins deceitfulness.¹

I was struck that God's love, goodness and His word can all be wrapped up in His mercy. Psalm 103 says... *The LORD is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. (v8) and But the steadfast love [mercy] of the LORD is from everlasting to everlasting on those who fear him, and his righteousness to children's children, (v17).*

Mercy has many synonyms such as leniency, clemency, compassion, grace, pity, charity, forgiveness, forbearance, kindness, sympathy, generosity, magnanimity and beneficence. Such words are synonymous with the Lord Jesus, and the antonym or opposite are

1. Bible In One Year, Day 305—Fix Your Thoughts (Part of Alpha International ©2023)

synonymous with the evil one - ruthlessness and cruelty.

So, I feel the Spirit is calling me, the preaching team and us all at GMC to rest in and trust upon the UNENDING MERCIES of God. This is the mercy of God that reigns upon those who call upon His name. The forgiveness of our sins by the death and resurrection of Jesus is the biggest mercy, the greatest grace we can ever know in our lives. We cannot earn it, we don't deserve it, yet it is ours if only we accept it. What mercy is that! Yet in receiving mercy we are in the same instance called to show mercy. Jesus in telling the story of the good Samaritan said, *Which of these three, do you think, proved to be a neighbour to the man who fell among the robbers?" He said, "The one who showed him mercy." And Jesus said to him, "You go, and do likewise."*

So, my hope is that in the coming year we as a church will both know the mercy of the Lord, individually and as His church and also show mercy to our families and friends, colleagues and neighbours. It might be worth pondering such questions as how do I receive mercy? Why do I need mercy? How can I show mercy? When does mercy come? How does mercy meet with justice and injustice, inclusion and exclusion, with sin and righteousness? Perhaps as we move through the sermons series in 2024 we will explore some of these themes and as a church body become assured of the love, grace, peace and mercy of our living and loving God, and in so doing feel equipped and confident to be sharing that good news with others.

So, to that end the GMC church office are providing you with some tools for sharing this Advent and Christmas. As well as this pastoral letter we are gifting you the following resources: **1x 'TryPraying'** booklet with a **'Use it and Lose it'** pamphlet | **1 x 'Why Christmas'** booklet (Alpha) | **1 x 'O Holy Night'** pamphlet (5 Reflections from ODB) | **1 x 'The Hope of Christmas'** leaflet | **1 x 'Father's Love Letter'** | **2 x GMC Advent & Christmas 2023 flyer** | **2 x GMC Who We Are flyer** | **2 x 'Invitation'**.

This may seem quite a lot of materials, but my hope and prayer is that not only may you use the resources yourself, but that you will share them. Give them away and bless folk with them. Give them to your family members, your friends, work colleagues, neighbours or someone you meet on the bus etc. Pray that the Lord would make opportunities for

your to share and also give you the confidence to share. These resources make it so easy! Just say to whomever it is, 'here, I'd like to bless you with this' and hand them which ever resource you feel is best for them. Importantly the 'INVITATION' needs you to put your name on it, so it then reads your name - e.g. 'Mike would love to sit alongside you this Advent and Christmas...' Give out the invite and tell the person you'd love to come to a service or two with them Christmas time. The Sunday morning worship dates are on the back of the invite, with additional service dates on the Advent & Christmas 2023 Flyer.

Reaching out with the Good News of Jesus is so important, perhaps the most important thing you can do in life. It restores and renews people through finding the mercy of the Lord. Christians have such a wonderful Christmas present to give. Please join in doing just that, maybe also supporting us on the 2nd December in our High Street Outreach, blessing people with the message of Christmas - Jesus Immanuel, God with us.

Your servant in Christ, *Pastor Mike* (Minister, GMC)

HIGH STREET OUTREACH

Date for your diary
Saturday 9th December
10am till noon

trypraying.



CONNECTING PEOPLE WITH JESUS

Sunday 3rd December

ADVENT 1 Sunday Worship and fellowship lunch: **10.30am**

'FAMILY' - from Luke 1.v26-38

BLUE CHRISTMAS SERVICE: 2.00pm

A reflective worship service on loss, with hope and remembrance in what for many, can be a lonely and difficult time

Sunday 10th December

ADVENT 2 Sunday Worship: 10.30am

'FOOD' - from John 1.v1-18

ENCOUNTER CHRISTMAS PRAISE: 6.30pm

A service of carols and readings, celebrating the season of Advent as we prepare our hearts for the coming of the Lord

Sunday 17th December

ADVENT 3 Sunday Worship: 10.30am

'FUN & FESTIVITY' - from Luke 2.v8-20

MESSY CHURCH: 10.30am

'CHRISTMAS AROUND THE FIRE' - Luke 2.v1-20

CHRISTMAS COMMUNION SERVICE: 2.00pm

Sunday 24th December

ADVENT 4 Sunday Worship: 10.30am

'FOCUS' - from Luke 1.v46-56

CHRISTMAS EVE Watchnight Service: 11.15pm

'FUNDAMENTAL FAITH' - from Matthew 1.v23-25

Monday 25th December

CHRISTMAS MORN' Worship: available from 9am online via Podcast or YouTube (there will be no In-Person Service)

'FULFILLED' - from Isaiah 9.v2-7

Sunday 31st December

NEW YEARS EVE Sunday Worship: 10.30am

'FASTING' - from Matthew 4.v1-11

CHRISTMAS

2023

at

