

**Preaching Christ....
...by the power of the Holy Spirit
...and the authority of the Word of God**

Date: 04 January 2026
Services: St John's Wishart
Series: Year of provocation
Reading: Hebrews 10:19-22
Title: Year of drawing close

- It seems to me that when you really begin to understand Christianity, there are many surprises...
- Tell me what you think...
- Here are some I've thought of...
 - That the entire move is not from **us** to **God**, but from **God** to **us**...
 - That God loves us – even when our backs were turned... no – let's not muck around – even when we were **rebell**ing against him
 - That he **makes** the first **move**
 - That it's all about what he has **done** for **us**, not about what **we do** for **him**...
 - That it's **NOT** all about **rituals** and **rules**
 - That (as you've heard me say many times) it's not about **religion**, but **relationship**!
- **Great, exciting, liberating** truths,...
- Here is one **more** which I think is **surprising** to many when they get it - that God is not some **ogre** in the sky from whom one must **keep** their **distance**...
- ...but someone who has drawn **near**... and made it possible for **rebels** like **me** to draw **near** – to stand in the **awesome presence** of the **King of Kings**!
- I want urge you to make 2026...the year of
 - **Drawing close**
 - **Closer to God in every way**... in love, devotion, commitment, dependence or trust, in service...
- So – let me tell you where we're going today:
 1. **Why?** Draw close
 2. **How?** Do you draw close
 3. **What?** – does it look like in practice?
- **WHY** draw close? Because we **can** and **should**! //
- Can I remind you that God has **drawn** close to **US** in the person of His **Son**!
- That as John 1 says – *And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us!* (John 1:14)
- That's **CLOSE**!
- That's about as **close** as a **creator** can come to his **creatures**! /

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- It's a **sure** sign of how **close** he **wants** to be with us...
- But there's more: following Jesus' **ascension** to the presence of his Father, God sent his **Holy Spirit** to dwell **where?** – **within** us... Paul to the Ephesians 3: *I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power **through his Spirit in your inner being**, 17 so that Christ may **dwell in your hearts** through **faith** //*
- That's even **closer!** //
- But how can this be? – since I am **flawed**... I was a **rebel**...?
- How can a **sinful person** like me **be** in the presence of a **holy, pure God** who cannot look on **sin**...?
- Or **how** can God dwell in **me** by his **Spirit**? //
- This is why I love this Hebrews passage which makes it so clear...
- Jesus has **opened** the **way**.
- You will recall that we read in the Gospels - the moment Jesus **died** – the **curtain** in the **temple** ripped in two from **top** to **bottom**...
- That curtain which **once KEPT sinful people** from a **holy God!**
- But Jesus **paid** the **price**
- He bore my **sin**
- “My **sin** upon his **shoulders**”
- He **opened** the way through the **curtain** – by his body – his **body** broken for us – give for us...
- ...so that our hearts may be **sprinkled** to **cleanse** us from a **guilty conscience**... and our bodies **washed**... as **symbolised** in our **baptism**...!
- As a result - I'm **clean**.
- God now sees me as “**holy**”.
- ...**because** he has dealt with all that was “**unholy**”.
- ...**and the access I now am welcome to have to the Father**... was symbolically represented in the curtain in the temple coming down!
- That means – someone like – **me** – like **you** – *can* now approach the **presence** of a **most holy God!**
- He has done all that was needed for **rebels** to meet the **King!**
- And so he now warmly **invites** us in to his **presence**... and the author of the letter to the Hebrews urges us to **draw near**... with **confidence** because of what he has done for us... ////
- Let's have a look again - *Therefore, [brothers], since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.*
- **Let us draw near to God!** ... an amazing **invitation** //
- Why do we **ignore** it?
- Why do we spend so much time with so much **distance** between God and ourselves...?
- Why do we **drift**?
- **Meander?**

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- **Procrastinate?**
- Make **excuses?**
- Grow **cold?**
- Sometimes – grow **HARD?** ///
- Friends... sometimes we're **pathetic** aren't we? (Perhaps I should speak for myself.)
- We have the amazing privilege of drawing ever so **close** to our **gracious heavenly Father...**
- ... and yet we often walk **apart...** //
- But friends... we'll explore shortly.... // What a great difference it will make when we **DO** draw near...
- ... so I'm urging us all.... to make 2026, the year of drawing near and *staying* near... ///
- ...ok... but **HOW?**
How do you do this??
- First – I need to say something here to anyone who perhaps is **not yet** a Christian.
- And you might say – well – surely Mark – everyone is here is a Christian – why else would they be here in church?
- But my experience over 38 years of ministry tells me that there will be people who are with us who aren't Christians for **many** reasons...
- There may be **some** who are just **checking out St John's...** on a journey to find out what Christianity is all about... that's **brilliant** – keep **going** – keep asking **questions...** !
- There may be **some** here who lovingly come with their **spouse** each week – because you're **kind** and **thoughtful** and **generous** and you want to **support** your **spouse** – that's **great...** so **glad** you're here...
- And there may be others who have **assumed** they're Christian for many years... but in reality, are people who simply **attend** church... and you know **nothing** of **genuine relationship** with **God...**
- if I've described *you*, in any of the above, then to draw **near** to **God** requires a **first** step of **turning your life around...**
- ... of turning your life around from that of a **rebel...** and changing allegiance from **yourself** as King, to the Lord God as **King...** // it means changing **sides...**
- Confessing that **YOU** have been at the front and centre of your life and making a purposeful turn **towards** God and asking for his **help** now to **love** and **serve** him as your **passion** and **priority**.
- The Bible word for that is to **repent**.
- And that's what Jesus first called people to do in the gospels – it wasn't just to '**believe** the **good news**' – but to '**repent**' and '**believe** the **good news**'. //
- So I want to urge anyone here today who is not a Christian – to do just that – to **repent** and **believe** the good news!
To turn from **sin** and **self** – to **God** and then with great joy and delight... **believe** the good news that if you **do** just that, there **IS forgiveness** and **peace** and **reconciliation** with God your Father and the **free gift** of **eternal life...** /
- That's the **starting** point in drawing near to God for those who are not yet Christians... ///
- ...but I also realise that probably **most** of us here today **ARE** Christians... some for a **very long time...**
- And the starting point for **US** in drawing near... well – it may still need to be **repentance...** mightn't it...?

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- In fact chances are – that it will!!...
- It's not that **huge** repentance at the **beginning**... but if you've wandered off... if your **love** has grown **cold**.... then **drawing near** will start with "**I'm sorry**"... – as a first step in coming back... /
- and continues in saying "Thank you so **much**" for your love and invitation to draw close... //
- and time reading the Bible, mulling it over, considering how it applies and what God is saying to you through his word...
- Time.
- **Unhurried.**
- **Regular.**
- **Real.**
- **Passionate.**
- **Heartfelt time.**
- When you get to **know** him
- Where you **listen** to him
- Where you are **still** before him / and know that he is God! ///
- And then saying to God (or saying again) – Lord – I'm **yours** – **whatever** you want for me – **your** will be done – **use** me as you **want**.. I want to offer myself to **you** to be **used** as you **will**.... ///
- Well, finally, I want to ask '**WHAT**'? //
- **What** does it look like when someone draws close to God?
- What **difference** does it make?
- Friends.... the closer you walk with your heavenly **Father**... your **small hand** in his **big hand**... then – watch out – the **more** your life will be **changed**!!
- When you walk closely with God...
- ... you will **worry** less knowing he has promised to provide for you
- ... you will know the **peace** that passes understanding because you will take **everything** to him in **prayer**...
- You will more readily **display** - *love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control* (Galatians 5:22-23) – because that will be the fruit of the Holy Spirit's work in your life
- You will handle **disaster** and **tragedy** – yes with sadness – but not with **despair** – because you will **know** and **trust** that God is with you as a **refuge** and **strength**...
- you will trust that God's plans for you are **good** and **perfect** – and you will have the **confidence** that all things work together for those who know and love the Lord... (Romans 8:28)
- You will have **wisdom** for the many decisions you make because walking with him will mean **seeing** and **understanding** the world more as **he** sees it. He will transform your mind...
- You will be **humble, dependent,**
- You will be **thankful** and **grateful**

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- You will become **other-person centred** as he works his change in you and as you grow more like the Lord Jesus...
- You will become **strong** and **bold** in the face of **temptation** because you will be so focused on **pleasing** him as you **walk** with him that you will increasingly share his **distaste** for **sin**...
- So you will shun **greed** and **materialism**, **envy** and **jealousy**
- You will face **death** with a measure of joyful **anticipation** because you will be **confident** you will be with the Lord and that you'll see him face to face.
- And so you will become more and **content** as you grow to know and trust the Saviour...
- You will have learned the **secret** of **contentment**... through walking with your **Father**...
- You'll be **content** because you will know that he's looking after you...
- You'll be **content** because you know you can trust him for the future...
- You'll trust that he has everything perfectly under his **control**
- You'll know that you're **loved** and **precious**
- And you'll **hold firm** to him
- **hold firm** no matter what storms or trials hit
 - No matter what **illness** or **accident** strikes
 - No matter what **persecution** or **ridicule** you'll suffer
 - No matter what **temptation** comes your way
 - You'll stand **firm**..!
- **Immoveable** in your relationship with God and your desire to **love** him, **serve** him, **worship** and **please** him... //
- That's what I want for us all as Christian people... ////

- Friends, we have such an amazing privilege.
- To walk so **closely**, so **intimately**, with **the King of Kings**!
- In **2026**, let's make sure we are doing just that.
- Put away any **insecurities** or **fears**.
- Cast aside any **distractions**; block any **temptations**
- ...let us draw ever **closer** to our **great** and **wonderful heavenly Father**.
- *since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith*