

Psalm 65 - Crown the year.

1 Praise is due to you,
O God, in Zion;
and to you shall vows be performed,
2 O you who answer prayer!
To you all flesh shall come.
3 When deeds of iniquity overwhelm us,
you forgive our transgressions.
4 Happy are those whom you choose and bring near
to live in your courts.
We shall be satisfied with the goodness of your house,
your holy temple.
5 By awesome deeds you answer us with deliverance,
O God of our salvation;
you are the hope of all the ends of the earth
and of the farthest seas.
6 By your strength you established the mountains;
you are girded with might.
7 You silence the roaring of the seas,
the roaring of their waves,
the tumult of the peoples.
8 Those who live at earth's farthest bounds are awed by your signs;
you make the gateways of the morning and the evening shout for joy.
9 You visit the earth and water it, you greatly enrich it;
the river of God is full of water; you provide the people with grain,
for so you have prepared it.
10 You water its furrows abundantly, settling its ridges,
softening it with showers, and blessing its growth.
11 You crown the year with your bounty;
your wagon tracks overflow with richness.
12 The pastures of the wilderness overflow,
the hills gird themselves with joy,
13 the meadows clothe themselves with flocks,
the valleys deck themselves with grain,
they shout and sing together for joy.

Introduction.

How do you measure a year?
You might say - 365 days 1st January to 31st December? Arbitrary. And doesn't quite work. That's why we need leap years.
Seasons? Perhaps - The Chinese new year is a spring festival.
The ancient Hebrews - Passover was the start of the year.
Church calendar Doesn't measure years by sun or moon, season, but by Gods own story.

Today is the Sunday next before advent.
Advent, Christmas, Lent, Passion-tide, Pentecost, and then from Late may to late november - this long stretch of ordinary time - but beautiful in its ordinariness. Abundant, blessed, creation redeemed.

So here at the end of the year, and at the end of one cycle of the story we pause and look back.

It has been another anxious and painful year. Politics, terrorism, economic. The stampede on Oxford street was dreadful - but isn't it a metaphor for where we are. Throngs of people, hunting cheap consumer goods, terrified of terrorist attack, wired to social media. The result is like tinder dry forest - All it takes is a spark and panic breaks loose.

But if you look in a different way, it has been a beautiful year.

One of my resolutions last year was to slow down and look more closely. The blessing of God in the beauty of creation, in the privilege of life, friendship and family, every day has a sunrise and sunset if you will just be there to see them in the changing of the season.

v11 "You crown the year with your bounty; your wagon tracks overflow with richness. The pastures of the wilderness overflow, the hills gird themselves with joy"

The heaven continuously declare the Glory of god.
And if you have ears to hear, God is speaking, quietly, the still small voice, through word and spirit. speaking love and comfort and wisdom.

So lets look back at some of the things God has been speaking to us as church.
(They say you don't remember sermons any more than you remember meals that you ate. But they are still important.)

1) Back in the spring, we studied Galatians - the Fruit of the Spirit

Love is not the first it is the whole. All the others are an exposition of it
Love is joy peace, patience, kindness goodness, gentleness faithfulness and self control.

How do they grow? They are not a result of hard work, dedication, or even self control, they are fruit and come from rootedness in God. You day by day, week by week you need to be taking time to be with God.

v4 Happy are those whom you choose and bring near to live in your courts. We shall be satisfied with the goodness of your house, your holy temple."

We are called to root yourself in the story of God, to delight in it. To meditate on it.
To remember your place in Gods story.
In the midst of a hard year, to set our struggles in the contest of Gods story.
They are like trees planted by streams of water,
In a desert land where rainfall is not dependable.
Those who are rooted God are sustained and bear fruit in season no matter how hard a year.

2) Then over the summer - Colossians

We found a real resonance - A letter of Paul to a fledgling church in danger of being pulled away from its true course by two powerful forces. Of being blown off course by the winds of prevailing culture, *"See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, "* or dragged back down to earth by the dead hand of traditional conservative religion.

And how were they to navigate a right course? - to keep Christ at the centre, day by day.
Confess that Jesus is Lord.

6 As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, continue to live your lives in him, 7 rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving.

But living well in a divided culture is not just about self interest.

Colossians 4v5 *Conduct yourselves wisely towards outsiders, making the most of the time.*

If you ever had a conversation with someone very wise, and you realise they don't say very much. But when they do it is careful and considered.

Your job with your non-christian friends and colleagues is not to answer their questions or demolish their arguments. It is to move them one step on.

Don't let questions go. Pray about them. Repond later. etc.

v6 *Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer everyone.*

And archive wisdom. When you hear profound truth, hold on to it, otherwise it just gets blown through by the wind of empty information. Do you have a notebook just for the real gems. The godsend wisdom. That moments when God actually puts his finger on you. Wisdom is more profitable than silver and yields better returns than gold. Proverbs 3:14

This is treasure that it is okay to hoard. Be like spiritual magpies.

Then this autumn we've been studying 1 Samuel

And one of the great themes in this book, all about challenging power and corruption. is the place of wisdom.

The story of the young boy in the temple, who hears a voice and runs i to see Eli the priest. You called master?

points to a responsibility to emulate Samuel. *'Speak Lord, your servant is listening'* Not 'listen lord for your servant is speaking' And what that does is means we take up an attitude of quiet attentiveness. We still our chattering minds.

But the boy Samuel grew up remarkable young man. Ch2v26 *Now the boy Samuel grew both in wisdom and stature and in favour with the Lord and with the people.*

In my experience listening to the word of God is a blend of scripture, reason, tradition and inspiation. The Holy Spirit draws a theme or a thought like Dumbledore drawing a memory from the Pensive.

We should say this (or words to this effect) before we read scripture, before we pray, before we listen to a sermon, before we walk in creation. *'Speak Lord, your servant is listening'* And when God does speak to us, we treasure that.

Wisdom gives a better return than gold . It is more valuable than precious stones; nothing you could desire is equal to it.

Hold on to it, seek it, treasure it.

Our advent project begins this week.

So our theme this year is Wisdom. We want to collect those precious gems of wisdom

Each of you is invited to contribute. They will be inspired by scripture and experience, they might be proverbs or sayings, they will be short and finely honed. Email me and I will collect them. And each day we will share one online and collect them at church.

Conclusion

How do you measure a year? Well perhaps the best way is how you have grown in wisdom and stature and favour with God.

v1 *Praise is due to you,*

O God, in Zion;

and to you shall vows be performed,

So look back with gladness despite everything. God is faithful.

It has been a beautiful year, Give God thanks for his faithfulness.

Don't be surprised...

But wicked people and impostors will go from bad to worse, deceiving others and being deceived. But as for you, continue in what you have learned and firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it 2 Timothy 3:13

Instead Root yourself in Christ

Be treasure hunters for wisdom

And be thankful