

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

**Date:** 06 February 2022  
**Services:** *Across the Diocese*  
**Series:** Year of provocation  
**Reading:** Hebrews 10:19-22  
**Title:** Year of drawing close

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- 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 **close**... and made it possible for **rebels** like **me** to draw **close** – to stand in the **awesome presence** of the **King of Kings**!
- I've called this series for February – kind of a **launch series** for the year – “**Year of provocation**”... where I want to provoke you – or I might say – **inspire** you – from Hebrews 10:19-25 – to do four things... I want urge you to make 2022...
- ...the year of
  - **Drawing close**
  - **Holding firm**
  - **Stirring up** – that is – to love and good works, AND
  - The year of **turning up**... more of that in due course
- So – let me tell you where we're going today in this the **first** of our series – year of **drawing close**...
- **Why?** Draw close
- **How?** Do you draw close
- **What?** – does it look like in practice?

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- **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 – he took on flesh and made his **dwelling among us!** (John 1:14)
- That's **CLOSE!**
- That's about as **close** as a **creator** can come to his **creatures!** /
- 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 our Hebrews reading 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...
- ...do 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...

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- Let's have a look again - *Therefore, brothers and sisters, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus,<sup>20</sup> by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body,<sup>21</sup> and since we have a great priest over the house of God,<sup>22</sup> **let us draw near to God with a sincere heart and with the full assurance that faith brings**, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having 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**?
- **Procrastinate**?
- Make **excuses**?
- Grow **cold**?
- Sometimes – grow **hard**? ///
- Friends... sometimes we're **pathetic** aren't we?
- 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...
- ... but I'm asking every one of us to make 2022 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 or watching this video?
- But my experience over 34 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 us out**... 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**.

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- 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 with 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 **in and 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...?
- In fact chances are – that it will!!...
- It's not that **huge** repentance at the **beginning...** but if you've wandered off... if you're **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...

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- ... 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, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and 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**
- 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 some 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...**
- That he has everything perfectly under his **control**
- That you’re **loved** and **precious**
- 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...
- And you’ll hold firm to him – more of that next week...
- But you’ll 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 you love him, serve him, worship and please him...
- That’s what I want for us as a church and across the diocese

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- That's what I want for **everyone**. ///
- Friends, we have such an amazing privilege.
- To walk so **closely**, so **intimately**, with **the King of Kings!**
- In **2022**, 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**.