

### **Sermon Christmas 2 January 3<sup>rd</sup> 2016**

“In him you also, when you had heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and had believed in him, were marked with the seal of the promised Holy Spirit; this is the pledge of our inheritance towards redemption as God’s own people, to the praise of his glory.”  
Ephesians 1:13-14

Those who believe in him are marked with the seal of the Holy Spirit, are we marked with the seal of the Holy Spirit as a church, as individuals? And if we are how is that visible to others? Because after all seals or brands are meant to be seen. In infant Baptism we receive the sign, the seal of the cross, at that point it is invisible, but the effect of that cross, and Jesus’ subsequent gift of the Holy Spirit is meant to be transformational as we show that love in our lives.

We hear about seals in the Old Testament: “Set me as a seal upon your heart, as a seal upon your arm; for love is strong as death, passion fierce as the grave. Its flashes are flashes of fire,

a raging flame.” (Song of Songs 8:6). This seal that we receive shows the strength of the love that we have received, it is a gift, it is passionate and is for us to share with others. This seal is transforming, passionate and life-enhancing. This is the seal we have the privilege to receive when we believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of the living God and accept his Holy Spirit into our lives.

I spent part of New Year’s Day with a passionate small-holder and heard about her garden and animals. At this time of year gardens are, or should be (!) lying dormant, gardeners are thinking, planning for spring. And then, after a lot of hard work, maintenance and care there is hopefully a fruitful garden, alive with colour and life.

I worry and pray, that we, both as a church and as individuals are lying dormant and have been for too long. That corporately at least we are not showing the fruits of the Spirit whose seal we bear. We are not surrounded by signs and wonders, we don’t expect miracles, we are not growing in numbers. All of these things would

be signs of the fruits of the Holy Spirit at work in our lives. They would be as visible as a seal on a letter or a brand on cattle. The first apostles give us a good account of this in the book of Acts, they were known for what was happening in their lives and the lives of others and Christianity grew out of small beginnings and unlikely people.

Having been 'born again' or having received an anointing from the Holy Spirit isn't enough to insure against this dormant phase. To return to the gardening analogy, everything needs pruning, weeding, feeding, it all needs work and care to be fruitful.

Have we weeded and pruned our own lives enough? Are we climbing to glory or are we slipping away from the supports? Is our growth stunted? All of these questions we need to pray about, to ask for God's guidance and help.

We have been redeemed, we have the offer of the seal of the Holy Spirit upon our lives, I pray that we will accept it. That our worshipping congregations will be seen to be fruitful in the

Spirit, as his gifts were given that we should be fruitful.

2016 can be our year to start bearing fruit, to raise our expectations of what God will do amongst us if we let him. He is a God who will bless us in abundance as we live our lives to the full in him. I pray that we can move forward in expectation, passion and fruitfulness so that we can be described as 'Good and faithful servants' that we can be seen in all our glory as the bride of Christ with the seal of the Holy Spirit being the mark by which we are known.