

January 2024

Dear Friends

I hope that you and your loved ones are well. How was your Christmas? I hope it was a time of blessing for you. And I hope that 2024 has started on a positive note for you in spite of all that is going on in the world at the moment. I wonder what you are hoping for in 2024...?

The turn of the year can be a time to both look forwards to what's to come and to reflect on the year that has passed – what are the things from 2023 (events, people, memories, discoveries etc) that you are particularly thankful for? Has that prompted or encouraged you to continue with an endeavour or start something new in 2024?

The start of a new year is also often presented, and thought of, as a time to take up new good habits and/or try to give up some of those less good habits; but in the last few weeks I have noticed a plethora of articles encouraging people to be realistic in their expectations and not to expect the changing of the year to equate to becoming a completely different person overnight. That sounds like wise advice to me – setting ourselves unrealistic expectations can often be self-defeating, and I was reminded recently that God never has unrealistic expectations about any of us, individually or corporately as the Church. Instead, God sees and loves us just as we are and, by the work of the Holy Spirit, daily helps and enables us to become all that we are created to be – something that takes at least a whole lifetime; so let's try to be patient with ourselves and sit more comfortably with God's timescales rather than get frustrated at not meeting our own!

However gradually we find ourselves transformed, and whatever 2024 may hold, I pray that we will each be able to say to God:

*"all my life You have been faithful; and all my life You have been so, so good.*

*With every breath that I am able ... I will sing of the goodness of God"*

(Goodness of God, Jason Ingram / Brian Johnson / Ed Cash / Ben Fielding / Jenn Johnson, © So Essential Tunes)

With love in Christ,

*Sarah*

Rev Sarah Parkin