*May the meditations of my heart and the words of my lips be acceptable to you, O Lord*

The sermon this morning celebrates the theme of **renewal** in our monthly series of sermons through our year of Witney 775.

The passage from Ecclesiastes that Judy read warns us to turn away from the empty and worthless vanities that occupy us as humans.

How do we renew ourselves in the light of these vanities?

A prophecy of **renewal** lies at the heart of today’s other OT reading from **Hosea**.

Writing in Israel 700 years before the birth of Jesus, he has often been seen as a "prophet of doom".

In fact, beyond the imminent destruction of the kingdom of Israel, he foresees that God’s abiding love and mercy promises **restoration and renewal**, even whilst the children of Israel continue turn away from God to worship other gods:

sacrificing …   and offering incense to idols,

Hosea reminds us that God’s capacity to love us is the deep love of a parent for their child: even when the child is naughty or wanders off, their parent’s love remains resolute:

I led them with cords of human kindness,  
   with bands of love.

   I bent down to them and fed them.

This reminds us that **our spiritual renewal** is only possible if we seek to grow a closer relationship with God. One generation after ignoring Hosea’s call to repent and turn back to God, the prophet Isaiah witnessed the destruction of the kingdom of Israel by the Assyrians.

Christian writers later saw Hosea’s call to repent as a forerunner of Jesus’ own call to the Jewish people to repent their ways if they were to usher in the Kingdom of God.

Whilst Hosea is speaking of Israel worshipping idols instead of God, we should be mindful of the modern idols we worship – the meaningless vanities and distractions that fill our lives and television screens: products and lifestyles and false status – which all take us away from our call to work with God to build his Kingdom.

And yet we know that, in spite of these modern idols that take us further from God, He continues to offer us his love and mercy.

Where is God in each of our hearts? How are we giving thanks for the abundance of all he provides us?

Our second hymn this morning quotes from **Psalm** **107** which tells us to….

give thanks to the Lord, for he is gracious,   
   for his steadfast love endures for ever.

4  Some went astray in desert wastes   
  
6  So they cried to the Lord in their trouble   
   and he delivered them from their distress.  
7  He set their feet on the right way

9  For he satisfies the longing soul   
   and fills the hungry soul with good.

The psalmist ends by telling us that…

43  Whoever is wise will ponder these things ♦︎  
   and consider the loving-kindness of the Lord.

And so we need to ponder if we are to **renew** **our close relationship with God**.

To ponder means making a conscious effort to hold God in our hearts.

God’s love cannot be taken for granted: only when we consciously turn to Him from worldly distractions, can we fulfil His vision for each of us.

God greatest gift was to send His only son Jesus so that Christ could set our “feet on the right way”. His son died on the cross for our sins and was reborn anew that we might gain eternal life.

We hear in the letter to the Christian community in Colossae (located in what is now western Turkey) how each of us needs to die to earthly things and turn our hearts on things of heaven if we are to build His kingdom on earth…

If you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God.

**2**Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things.

**3**For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God.

**4**When Christ, who is yourlife, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.

The Colossians are called on to…

put on the new self, which is **being renewed in knowledge** in the image of its Creator.

If…

Christ is all, and is in all

then how can we as a renewing church put on this new self?

Jesus came to teach us a gospel of repentance and abundance.

repentance that we might turn away from earthly things and set our eyes on God.

abundance in the gifts of the Holy Spirit which God sends us to help us in our Kingdom-building tasks.

This Kingdom building is not an easy thing but so radical that it threatens our human complacency. This morning’s Gospel showcased just how radical we are called to be.

Jesus in the Parable of the Rich Fool teaches us how radical we need to be if we are to follow Christ and build His father’s Kingdom “on earth as in heaven”.

A ‘parable’ is a story that turns ordinary reality upside down

just as the geometric shape – the parabola – throws a line up in the air and brings it down in an opposite position on our schoolbook page.

Jesus uses parables to warn those listening just how different the Kingdom of God will be: the last will be first, the hungry will dine at God’s table, the most vulnerable in society will receive love and be given back their self-worth.

His parable is not decrying the building of a new barn but warning us about how we use the abundance in our barns, lest we lose our very souls.

The Rich Fool sits back and decides that his labours for the Kingdom can now take a back seat. He can relax and ignore everyone else and live off the proceeds of his God-giving fruits: even though the abundant grain in his barn has come from God’s loving providence.

Any who ignore the source of their blessings do so at their peril.

If, “this very night your life” is “demanded from you”, what will you have to show for how you used the many blessings you have received?

In a wonderful sermon on how we should respond to God’s infinite generosity, Rowan Williams (when he was Archbishop) described how our lives are like a tiny hollow ledge half way down Niagara Falls. God’s divine love and blessings continue shower into our lives, replenishing us in a never-ending flow. Our little hollow overflows because we can never use all the blessings and gifts that He provides.

This image exhorts us to take courage in God’s providence, not fearing that we will be overcome by scarcity but that we should know that God provides…

As Christians we are called to use our giving, time and Spirit-led skills to build His Kingdom in this place. To build our church to be a Servant Church, serving the people of our town, speaking into the injustices of modern life, and giving the most vulnerable in our world a place at our table.

The Gospel of Jesus is a gospel of abundance not a gospel of scarcity. When we are beset by money fears, we should not dishonour our relationship with God by ignoring the fact that our heavenly father will always provide. Courage is about knowing what you fear and setting it aside just the same in the faith that God will provide what we need.

Otherwise, for….

21  whoever stores up things for themselves but is not rich towards God.’

will lose everything.

775 years ago the people of Witney rebuilt this barn, and so we here are each blessings

Go therefore and be a blessing to this town…….

Creator Father,

May we live as those made alive in Christ, Your generous servants. Amen

## **Ecclesiastes 1.2,12-14, 2.18-23**

2 Vanity of vanities, says the Teacher,  
   vanity of vanities! All is vanity.

12 I, the Teacher, when king over Israel in Jerusalem, 13applied my mind to seek and to search out by wisdom all that is done under heaven; it is an unhappy business that God has given to human beings to be busy with. 14I saw all the deeds that are done under the sun; and see, all is vanity and a chasing after wind.

18 I hated all my toil in which I had toiled under the sun, seeing that I must leave it to those who come after me 19—and who knows whether they will be wise or foolish? Yet they will be master of all for which I toiled and used my wisdom under the sun. This also is vanity. 20So I turned and gave my heart up to despair concerning all the toil of my labours under the sun, 21because sometimes one who has toiled with wisdom and knowledge and skill must leave all to be enjoyed by another who did not toil for it. This also is vanity and a great evil. 22What do mortals get from all the toil and strain with which they toil under the sun? 23For all their days are full of pain, and their work is a vexation; even at night their minds do not rest. This also is vanity.

**Hosea 11.1-11**

When Israel was a child, I loved him,  
   and out of Egypt I called my son.   
The more I[\*](javascript:void(0);) called them,  
   the more they went from me;[\*](javascript:void(0);)  
they kept sacrificing to the Baals,  
   and offering incense to idols.

Yet it was I who taught Ephraim to walk,  
   I took them up in my[\*](javascript:void(0);) arms;  
   but they did not know that I healed them.   
I led them with cords of human kindness,  
   with bands of love.  
I was to them like those  
   who lift infants to their cheeks.[\*](javascript:void(0);)  
   I bent down to them and fed them.

They shall return to the land of Egypt,  
   and Assyria shall be their king,  
   because they have refused to return to me.   
The sword rages in their cities,  
   it consumes their oracle-priests,  
   and devours because of their schemes.   
My people are bent on turning away from me.  
   To the Most High they call,  
   but he does not raise them up at all.[\*](javascript:void(0);)

How can I give you up, Ephraim?  
   How can I hand you over, O Israel?  
How can I make you like Admah?  
   How can I treat you like Zeboiim?  
My heart recoils within me;  
   my compassion grows warm and tender.   
I will not execute my fierce anger;  
   I will not again destroy Ephraim;  
for I am God and no mortal,  
   the Holy One in your midst,  
   and I will not come in wrath.[\*](javascript:void(0);)

They shall go after the Lord,  
   who roars like a lion;  
when he roars,  
   his children shall come trembling from the west.   
They shall come trembling like birds from Egypt,  
   and like doves from the land of Assyria;  
   and I will return them to their homes, says the Lord.

**Psalm 107.1-9, 43**

1  O give thanks to the Lord, for he is gracious, ♦︎  
   for his steadfast love endures for ever.  
2  Let the redeemed of the Lord say this, ♦︎  
   those he redeemed from the hand of the enemy,  
3  And gathered out of the lands  
      from the east and from the west, ♦︎  
   from the north and from the south.  
4  Some went astray in desert wastes ♦︎  
   and found no path to a city to dwell in.  
5  Hungry and thirsty, ♦︎  
   their soul was fainting within them.  
6  So they cried to the Lord in their trouble ♦︎  
   and he delivered them from their distress.  
7  He set their feet on the right way ♦︎  
   till they came to a city to dwell in.  
8  Let them give thanks to the Lord for his goodness ♦︎  
   and the wonders he does for his children.  
9  For he satisfies the longing soul ♦︎  
   and fills the hungry soul with good.  
43  Whoever is wise will ponder these things ♦︎  
   and consider the loving-kindness of the Lord.

**Colossians 3.1-11**

### Living as Those Made Alive in Christ

1 Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. 2Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. 3For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. 4When Christ, who is your[[a](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Colossians+3%3A1-11&version=NIV#fen-NIV-29522a)] life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.

**5**Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry. **6**Because of these, the wrath of God is coming.[[b](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Colossians+3%3A1-11&version=NIV#fen-NIV-29524b)] **7**You used to walk in these ways, in the life you once lived. **8**But now you must also rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips. **9**Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices **10**and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator. **11**Here there is no Gentile or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all.

**Luke 12:13-21**

**The parable of the rich fool**

13 Someone in the crowd said to him, ‘Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me.’

14 Jesus replied, ‘Man, who appointed me a judge or an arbiter between you?’ 15 Then he said to them, ‘Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; life does not consist in an abundance of possessions.’

16 And he told them this parable: ‘The ground of a certain rich man yielded an abundant harvest. 17 He thought to himself, “What shall I do? I have no place to store my crops.”

18 ‘Then he said, “This is what I’ll do. I will tear down my barns and build bigger ones, and there I will store my surplus grain. 19 And I’ll say to myself, ‘You have plenty of grain laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry.’”

20 ‘But God said to him, “You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?”

21 ‘This is how it will be with whoever stores up things for themselves but is not rich towards God.’