**Sermon Stowe 8am New Year’s Day 2022**

Well here we are at the start of 2022 and I’m sure we are all hoping that the coming year will be better than the one that has just finished. Speaking personally, last year was pretty lousy but ended well. We managed to get all our children and grandchildren together on Monday and we had a lovely time together renewing the bonds of love and family that tie us together.

If 2022 is to be better than 2021 then at least some of the qualities we, as a family, experienced have to be transferred and seen on a larger scale that our small group of people. There will be some things about 2022 that we cannot influence. Covid is going to remain a significant factor but the way we treat each other – the way we behave – the way we show our love for each other on a local, national and international stage will be crucial. There is only a few of us here now but we are not powerless; we can set the scene by our influence on the way those around us behave.

The readings we heard are telling us how this should work out. Fundamental is the foundation on which our lives are built. Our Gospel reading tells us that we should be looking up to Jesus to be our model showing us how we should behave and lead and encourage others to behave. Because Jesus is the earthly model of the creator of everything and has shown us how far his love can and did go to save us. He is worthy of our worship and obedience.

Our reading from Paul’s letter to the Ephesians lays out how this can work in a real community. The key words in this passage are ‘us’ and ‘we’. Each of us is an autonomous individual but we should not see ourselves as isolated and alone trying to swim against the tide of our times but as a part of a community that is trying to live in a loving way. Paul was under no doubt about who is in charge “*Praise be to the God and Father who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing.”* He expands this to define our relationship with God, and wrote; *“For he chose us to be holy and blameless in his sight.”* That’s the target we should aim at. That’s easy for me to say but what might it mean? We are chosen to be holy. Holy means set aside – set aside from the priorities that pervade our society and world; Priorities that put self first at the expense of others. It means we should strive to be whole people – people who are self sufficient who put their trust and faith in the one who made us and everything around us. That’s a very tall order but is our calling and if we try, if we begin to succeed we will be blameless in his sight. That’s a very brief summary of what I think our readings can teach us. And I know that I am very far from achieving it but I think I’m on the road. And I hope that in this coming year you will move in the direction that God has for you in your unique situation. Amen – which means YES, may it be so. Amen