

Here we are, from October 1967 to November 2016 - 49 years in this building! In October 1967, while I was preparing for my Senior Cambridge school leaving examinations, Britain's first local radio station, Radio Leicester began broadcasting; the BBC banned the Beatles' song, "I Am the Walrus", and we devalued the pound from \$2.80 to \$2.40

Perhaps most relevant to the events of today, on 27 November, 1967 the French President Charles de Gaulle said 'Non!' for the second time, to Britain's entry to the European Common Market.

49 is a significant number. If you are mathematically inclined, 49 is the square of 7: $7 \times 7 = 49$.

The Bible teaches us, God created the earth in six days and rested on the seventh. When God gave Moses the laws to govern the life and times of the Hebrew people, he said, *Remember the Sabbath Day to keep it Holy*. God did not tell them what to do on the Sabbath to keep it Holy, but He used the principle of the Sabbath to explain His perfect Kingdom. *At the end of every seventh year you must cancel the debts of everyone who owes you money. This is how it must be done. Everyone must cancel the loans they have made to their fellow Israelites. They must not demand payment from their neighbours or relatives, for the Lord's time of release has arrived. ... There should be no poor among you, for the Lord your God will greatly bless you in the land He is giving you as a special possession. You will receive this blessing if you are careful to obey all the commands of the Lord your God that I am giving you today. The Lord your God will bless you as he has promised.*¹

Our economic and social system is far removed from God's vision of a perfect society. I can think of many programmes and matching slogans to combat poverty and wipe-out poverty, but God tells us, if every seven years, lenders forgive debts owed by the poor, there will be no poor among us; and if we do this regularly, God will bless as He has promised. This is the rule of the Sabbatical year.

God's blessing goes further. At the end of seven cycles of seven years, they were commanded to forgive debts, **AND** set people free! Not only free from debt and free from bondage, but any asset held as a pledge or

¹ Deuteronomy 15:1-6 (also Exodus 23:10-11 and Leviticus 25:1-7)

security against a debt, was to be returned, no questions asked! *“And you shall sanctify the fiftieth year, and proclaim freedom [for slaves] throughout the land for all who live on it. It shall be a Jubilee for you, and you shall return, each man to his property, and you shall return, each man to his family.”*²

This was known as the rule of the Jubilee year, a year of rest from work. In the 49th year, God provided a harvest which would be enough to last that year, the 50th year, and the 51 year (3 years), until the next harvest came in on the 52 year, having planted it in the 51st year.

You might well say, *We are not Jews or Hebrew people! Is this of any significance to us?* Well, No! But, we live by the principles of God’s economy and society.

By His very nature, of God being who God is, God’s economy is not one of scarcity, it is one of abundance. God is Creator, and everything belongs to Him. God’s abundance is our blessing. God pours His abundance and “my cup overflows”³, our barns are filled to capacity and overflowing, and our vats are overflowing with new wine⁴. Our response to God’s blessing overflowing, is not to build bigger barns to store the overflow for ourselves. The overflow, God’s blessing of more than we need, is God’s way of blessing others in need, through us. God blesses us, to be a blessing to others.

When we upset this principle, things go wrong.

It is a very, very subtle way by which we appropriate for ourselves, that which is not intended for us. By taking and keeping for ourselves, anything beyond our own needs, upsets the principle of God’s perfect society and economy.

Everyday we hear, we see and we read of abuses in marital relationships, abuses in parental relationships, and abuses in other social relationships. Corrupt leaders and unscrupulous people in positions of authority and responsibility, appropriate for themselves the wealth of their nation

² Leviticus 25:10

³ Psalm 23

⁴ Proverbs 3:10

which belongs to the people of the country. Bullies, and those who force people to be, or do things against their will, are appropriating for themselves, the control over the lives of others, depriving them of living under God's control. A murderer is taking control of another person's life, because the murderer decides they don't have a right to live.

The principle of God's blessing is that **He** fills **our** cup to the brim, shaken, patted down, and continues to pour into our filled cup, for us to take the overflow and share it with those who need it.

In Acts chapter 3, we have a practical example of this principle. Following on from Pentecost, people in the early church brought God's blessings to them, to the church, to be shared with anyone who had need.⁵

We are told, however, of one incident when a couple, appropriated for themselves, that which did not belong to them. Ananias and his wife Safira did a good thing by deciding together to sell a plot of land they owned, and give the proceeds to the Church, to be shared among those who had need. They probably received more than they expected, and decided to keep the "overflow" for themselves, thereby violating the principle of God's blessing, bringing swift judgement on themselves!

The book of Proverbs gives us principles by which God rules His kingdom. *Honour the Lord with your capital and sufficiency earned from righteous labour, and with the first-fruits of all your income; So shall your storage places be filled with plenty, and your vats shall be overflowing with new wine.*⁶

This morning we have **Remembered** the past with gratitude and thankfulness to God, and we are grateful to those who brought these memories to us. We **Rejoiced** in the present, welcoming people into fellowship, recognising God at work in His Church; we **Prepared** for the future, by asking *forgiveness*. The future is not in our hands, and we need God's forgiveness for making our own plans outside of His; by *repenting* our stubbornness, and expressed our desire for *reconciliation* with those

⁵ Acts 2:44-47

⁶ Proverbs 3:9-10

who are also part of the body of Christ (they may not be perfect, but then neither are we).

To celebrate this anniversary is **ONLY** possible because of God's sacrifice of His Son on the cross. We are children of the Resurrection! The cross does not separate us, the cross unites us. Because of the cross, we are united **as** one body, because we follow the One and only Christ into the presence of the Father.

All that we have been, all that we are, all that we will be, is because Jesus takes pride in us, our worship, our giving, our meetings, our fellowship, our celebration and He is pleased to ask God's abundant blessing be poured out **to** us, **among** us, and overflowing **from** us. We stand, not in vain pride, but pride in our Father God, who has blessed us and continues to bless us.

Its all about relationship. Jesus said, *"If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you."*⁷

We like the second part of the Jesus statement, *Ask whatever you wish...*

But a relationship is two-way. *If **you** make Me a part of your life, Jesus says, I will make you a part of My life, **and My life will flow through you and overflow to others.***

134 years ago, the word of God was first preached in Botley. It continues to be preached in Botley because of people who made Jesus a part of their lives by living according to God's Word, and people who shared God's abundant blessing in their lives, with those in need.

This is our last anniversary in this building. Next year, 2017, will be a year of rest for us, a Jubilee year, and the following year, 2018, we hope to celebrate Christmas in a new building, which is God's great gift to us.

Anniversaries last for a day, but celebration is for a lifetime! Let's enjoy the year of Jubilee God is giving us, renew and grow our relationship with Jesus our Christ, and be a refreshed people to continue God's work in a new building! **AMEN**

⁷ John 15:7