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A REFLECTION

It still looks as though this **IS** our last worship service in this place. There are two sticking points which should be agreed on Monday and then we are through. We are truly grateful to God for this period of transition and this space, to continue as a Church community, to welcome people into fellowship and membership, get to know people we didn't know before, and for some, to experiment sitting next to people they did not know, and getting to know them.

Botley Baptist has a reputation for being a friendly and welcoming Church. On Sunday 26th January and 2 February, our first two Sundays in our new Church, there will be several who will visit for the first time. May I make this request of you: weather permitting, we will gather outside the Church, cut a ribbon and enter the lobby. As we enter the Sanctuary, we will be singing, "To God be the Glory". Can I encourage you please, to uphold our reputation of being friendly and welcoming, by looking around for someone you know is new, someone you don't know, and sit beside them and make them feel welcome? A simple act such as this, speaks volumes about who we are, adds truth to our reputation!

Over the next year, we shall be going through the process we talked about last Sunday: leaving behind what is in the past (*not our past, but what is **in** the past*), we shall embrace the present and we shall exert every ounce of physical, emotional and spiritual energy to move forward into a future unknown and unmapped, but a future that is certain in the hands of the One who has planned it, our Father God Himself. Our journey will be similar to that of the Hebrew people moving out of their familiar home in Egypt, to a Promised, unfamiliar and distant land.

In preparation for entering our **Promised Land** (our new building), our theme today is taken from Luke 12:48, ***If God has been generous with you, He will expect you to serve him well. But if He has been more than***

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generous, he will expect you to serve him even better (To whom much is given, much more is expected).

I have said this before and the Deacons are tired of hearing me say this, God has been **more than generous** in giving us the new Church building we are about to enter in two weeks, and we would be well advised to consider the question, **What would God have us do with this gift?**

Ask around and people will tell you, there are hardly any Churches who come out of a new development, with **ZERO DEBT!** The value of God's gift to us is beyond anyone's imagination. I remember a person who is no more with us saying to me in November 2002 when we first mooted the idea of a new building because the cost of upkeep of the old one was getting unsustainable, *Kalyan, where do you think the money for a new building will come from?* I remember (and Ted will too) a meeting with the then Manager of the Baptist Union Corporation (who hold in trust the land deeds for all 2,800 UK Baptist Churches) say to us, *Unless you bring me a Church resolution which states that ALL members of your Church, covenant to pay for the new building, its not going to happen.* 18 months later, this person retired and the person who succeeded was most welcoming of the idea, and supported our then business plan to pay back in 12 years, the capital sum borrowed, from the income generated by the building.

I could tell you of several hurdles and obstacles Ted and I have jumped over, run through and run around, before this became a reality!

The main lesson we take from our journey is this: **What God has purposed in His heart to do, no one can stop!** People can try, but no one can stop God; what we have today, is what God purposed in His heart we should have: a new building, in the exact location it has been built, and that is what **HE** has achieved.

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At this stage, I want to leave you with a helpful narrative, but before that, lets' **SING: Bless the Lord O my Soul (Mission Praise 56).**

NARRATIVE LESSON: A young man came to me at the end of worship and said, "I can understand '*God bless me*', but how can I '*Bless God*'?" What does it mean, '*Bless the Lord, O My Soul*'?"

I asked him, "Do you have any children?"

"Yes," he replied, "a boy six and a girl, five."

"At Christmas, do they give you a present?"

"Sure," he replied.

"Where do they get the money," I asked.

"Well, I give it to them," he chuckled.

"That's exactly it," I said, "You pay for the Christmas presents your children give you! Don't you feel joy when they're whispering excitedly with their mother, that they are going to surprise Daddy with a present? On Christmas morning, they say, '*Daddy, here is a blessing for you.*' The money came from you, but wasn't it a blessing to you when it came back with their love?"

When we sing, "Bless the Lord, O My Soul", we are praising Him for blessings He poured into our lives. **AMEN.**

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SERMON An Indescribable Gift

What is a gift? Something given in love to some one we love/value. How then do we justify an Unwanted Christmas Present Auction at Florence Park Community Centre on 18th January?!

We might be aware of a hierarchy of gifts:

Acceptable gifts	Obligatory gifts
Meaningful gifts	Valuable gifts
Invaluable gifts	Cherished gifts

You might be able to classify your Christmas gifts in each of these categories, and you might even be able to think **why** the person gave you that gift, and you might find ways to express your gratitude and thanks to the giver of the gift.

What makes a gift "**indescribable**"?

We cannot describe the thoughtfulness and intentionality that went into the gifts we received at Christmas; it is equally difficult to describe how the gift made you feel!

Writing his second letter to the Church in Corinth, the Apostle Paul picks up on Jesus' statement quoted by Luke, *to whom much more is given, much, much more is expected*¹. Reflecting on God's giving of His Son, Paul describes this gift as "**indescribable**", *too wonderful for words*.² In all his correspondence, Paul describes the doctrines of the incarnation, atonement and resurrection, but when it comes to God's gift of His Son, Paul says this gift is "indescribable", beyond **any** string of words anyone can put together. Paul is struck by wonder and awe over God's thoughtfulness and intentionality in gifting us His Son.

¹ Luke 12:48

² 2 Corinthians 9:15

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Paul lets his mind carry his thoughts, *Who is this loving, personal God who would give such a gift?*

You see, our relationship with God starts with God's well-thought-out, intentional gift to us, of His Son to be our Saviour; our relationship with God does not start with what we can do for God.

Paul uses this metaphor to explain: *a farmer who plants only a few seeds will get a small crop. But the one who plants generously will get a generous crop. ... Then you will always have everything you need and plenty left over to share with others. ...* Paul explains, *God is the one who provides seed for the farmer and then bread to eat.* Paul is driven to action, because he knows the **indescribable** value of the gift God, out of His generosity, has given.

Why has God done this?

As with the farmer, God will provide and increase your resources and then produce a great harvest of generosity in you.

Once again, Paul is drawing on Luke's record of Jesus' teaching on forgiveness³, when He says, *Give, and you will receive. Your gift will return to you in full—pressed down, shaken together to make room for more, running over, and poured into your lap. The amount you give will determine the amount you get back."* Or, *The measure you use to give, will be the measure you get back,* the same metaphor Paul uses about the farmer, *God gives the seed; plant a little of it, you will enjoy a small harvest, but plant as much as possible, and you will reap a harvest beyond your imagination!*

It is a marvellous thing God has done. It started with God giving us a new, multi-purpose building, into which we shall enter and start using by the end of this month. God has given the seed, **AND** God will give the harvest.

³ Luke 6:38

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The question is this, ***Will we be faithful in our generosity towards those in need?***

This generosity is not about giving money away!

The purpose of God enriching us ***in every way***, is two-fold:

first: so that ***we can ALWAYS be generous.***

second: when God's generosity is shared among those in need, ***they will joyfully express*** their thanks to God, for this indescribable gift, which is too wonderful for words!

It started with God having purposed in His heart that He will bless us with a new Church for His work to be done in Botley and beyond. Now that this is a reality and we begin to enjoy the facilities God has given us, shall we make a commitment, that the overflow of God's blessings to each of us will meet the needs of the Church, and from the overflow of God's blessings to the Church, we will be obedient to prayerfully meet the needs of those brought to our attention, ***that they will joyfully express their thanks to God?!***

This is how we can be God's instrument of adding and multiplying happiness and joy on earth, to reflect the happiness and joy present in Heaven.

To whom much more is given, much, much more is expected! Will we be contagious agents of God's generosity?

AMEN