Manchester Circuit end-of/start-of year Retreat at Home

**New Years Eve**

Welcome to this retreat at home to mark the end of 2020.

You might like to find in readiness

* your diary or calendar from 2020,
* your address book,
* a candle with battery (or a light which can remain on overnight),

**Time**

Welcome to this evening and morning mini retreat in two parts.

Today, marks the end of one calendar year and the threshold of a new year.

We mark many year endings. The end of the tax year in April sees the spending or moving of money in bank accounts, the end of the Connexional year sees some ministers moving, the liturgical year closes in November and the end of the calendar year is tonight.

We hear about time from the first verses of Genesis and the creation story over seven days. The book of Ecclesiastes has a lot to say about time and a season for everything under heaven. When Jesus’ disciples asked him “what will be the sign of your coming and the end of the age, Jesus replied no-one knows the day or the time of his return except the Father. Not knowing when is quite difficult and particularly pertinent at the moment.

Nevertheless, to a greater or lesser extent, we live an ordered life. Days, weeks and years divide into work, sleep, leisure, worship, prayer, household administration.

American John Greenleaf Whittier was a quaker who firmly believed that God was best worshipped in silent meditation. This familiar verse is drawn from an interlude in his long and eccentric poem called *The Brewing of Soma.*

*Drop Thy still dews of quietness,  
Till all our strivings cease;  
Take from our souls the strain and stress,  
And let our ordered lives confess  
The beauty of Thy peace*

In the peace, pause to consider how this last year has felt. Perhaps peace has been hard to find. Maybe some of the year’s seasons have felt short. Alternatively, some months may have felt like an eternity.

Perhaps particular words, feelings or pictures encapsulate how you feel about these last twelve months.

Find some calming music and spend some time noting down your thoughts. Perhaps even compose a poem or sketch an image.

**Looking back over the year…**

Today is a perfect time to look back over the year as an offering, a remembering, thankfulness, a laying down, of confession.

**Blessings.** A glance over the year will reveal some diamonds in the dust. Moments of unexpected joy, kindnesses shown, mercies received.

Take some time to look back through the diary or calendar, noting appointments, meetings, even the crossed-out engagements. Giving thanks.

**Regrets**

This year inevitably has contained regrets. Sometimes we wish we could go back and respond differently. On other occasions, despite our regrets, we could have done nothing about things which have happened.

Thankfully, scripture provides examples of a way back, for confession and forgiveness, for repentance and reorientation.

A quote I found recently says this: *I do not think you should let go of your sin until you have learned what it has to teach you.* Richard Rohr.

Take a few moments to write or draw in picture form any regrets, mistakes, including wrongs done to you.

Consider what God wants to say to you about these.

**Losses**

Almost inevitably there will have been friends, family members, acquaintances we have lost this year.

You might want to pause and read the pages of your address book, noticing the gaps.

Thank God for the place each one has in your heart. Write a message to them, or a paragraph which sums up their impact on your life.

This year may also have brought

* Losses of relationship,
* Friendships which have changed in nature.
* Loss of employment and our place in an organisation.
* Loss of value as a volunteer.
* Loss of status or income.

Someone wise said, *Grief is the price we pay for love.*

Allow yourself time and space to remember, to cry. Offer these feelings to God in prayer.

**Walking in the Light**

In Genesis 1, these words are repeated, *And it was evening, and it was morning*; day one, *And it was evening, and it was morning*; the second day" … By mentioning evening before morning, Genesis defines a day as beginning with the evening, followed by the morning.

Everyone agrees that life is full of ups and downs. We go through periods where the sun is shining upon us and we feel on top of the world, only to turn a corner and be faced with difficulties and obstacles that drag us down. But it isn't long before something pleasant comes our way to pick us up again.

The question is: which one wins the day, the ups or the downs? In other words, is life a series of disappointments dotted by the occasional glimmer of hope, only to be crushed by another surge of gloominess? Or are we on a journey upwards, with challenges along the way to make us even stronger in our quest for enlightenment?

Does darkness extinguish light, or does light conquer darkness? Does night follow day or day follow night?

The biblical view is clear. "And it was evening, and it was morning." First the night, then the day. Darkness is a pathway to the sunrise hiding behind it. A challenge comes our way only to help us tap in to and reveal our inner powers that have until now remained unfathomed.

There is comfort in knowing that no matter how dark it may seem, light will have the last word.

In this last act for part one of this mini-retreat. I invite you to switch on your candle or a light which can be left on overnight.

Jesus said, “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life.”  John 8:12