

## **TAKE TIME OUT - Pastoral Retreat**

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### **Monthly Message – January 2021**

Reverend Janice A. Morgan MA. BSc.

This month's 'Message' is longer than usual because I have included the relevant Scriptures for your convenience. The time is always right to contemplate where we are with God and get back to basics according to His Word. But perhaps it is even more effective when our thoughts turn to New Year resolutions? As we stand at the beginning of a New Year, two Scriptures come to mind that start *'In the beginning'*. **Genesis 1:**<sup>1</sup>In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, <sup>2</sup>the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters. **John 1:**<sup>1</sup>In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. <sup>2</sup>He was in the beginning with God. <sup>3</sup>All things came into being through Him, and without Him not one thing came into being. What has come into being <sup>4</sup>in Him was life, and the life was the light of all people. <sup>5</sup>The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.

It is comforting to remind ourselves (especially considering current world circumstances), that God is in charge. If God created all things out of a void and brought chaos into order, then we can trust Him to look after what His loving hand has made. Conversely, it is challenging to remind ourselves that every time we disobey God's Word we open an opportunity for evil. Satan will undoubtedly use our disobedience to throw God's creation back into chaos on every occasion if he can. This we should know from the example of what he did in the Garden of Eden. However, if we turn back to our Creator God, He can restore order out of the chaos we have caused. To restore the harmony of God's Creation we need only to repent! We begin by recognising and acknowledging our wrongdoing; what we have said or done wrong *and* the good that we have *not* said or done. True repentance comes from an honest and humble heart, which cleanses the soul, giving the sinner a new beginning and a fresh start, without which nothing can be restored.

**Isaiah 40:**<sup>28</sup>Have you not known? Have you not heard? The Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He does not faint or grow weary; His understanding is unsearchable. <sup>29</sup>He gives power to the faint, and strengthens the powerless. <sup>30</sup>Even youths will faint and be weary, and the young will fall exhausted; <sup>31</sup>but those who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint.

How wonderful to know that "those who wait for the Lord" and turn back to God shall be given power. This is not the empty 'here today and gone tomorrow' false power of the world, nor the power and vigour of youth or worldly prowess. The power God promises is that of His Spirit communing with the spirit of those faithful to God. For the faithful, their position in life does not matter, God's power works through the heart to renew their strength, irrespective of circumstance. Oh that we would see God's power today, working through the faithful in our battle against the evils caused by sin and highlighted by the pandemic. Thank God for those demonstrating sacrificial love but sadly, all too many are undermining their good work by indulging in deadly sins. Aggressive speech and behaviour, greed, political wrangling for personal gain and selfish attitudes that spread disease and death to others without a second thought seems to reign. We should not be deceived; honouring God

requires obeying His commands and following the example of Jesus. We should not be complacent; faith requires action, to speak Truth and expose corruption in those causing it. We cannot claim ignorance for Jesus demonstrated how we are to stand in faith against evil: **Matthew 21:**<sup>12</sup>Then Jesus entered the temple and drove out all who were selling and buying in the temple, and He overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of those who sold doves. <sup>13</sup>He said to them, "It is written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer'; but you are making it a den of robbers."

**John 2:**<sup>14</sup>In the temple He found people selling cattle, sheep, and doves, and the money changers seated at their tables. <sup>15</sup>Making a whip of cords, He drove all of them out of the temple, both the sheep and the cattle. He also poured out the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables. <sup>16</sup>He told those who were selling the doves, "Take these things out of here! Stop making My Father's house a market place!"

Yet, who among the Body of Christ will have the strength of faith to stand against corruption as Jesus did? How mindful of God are we? Will God's people rise up to drive out corruption and restore the church to righteousness in accord with His Word?

**Psalms 90:**<sup>11</sup>Who considers the power of Your anger? Your wrath is as great as the fear that is due You. <sup>12</sup>So teach us to count our days that we may gain a wise heart.

We can pray, 'Please God help us!' as often as we want but if our request issues from an unrepentant or complacent heart it will remain unanswered. Contained in the hymn, 'In Christ Alone' are the words, 'Till on that cross as Jesus died, the wrath of God was satisfied'. These few words caused a great deal of controversy, as many in the church took offence at God being wrathful. Yet, if we take the time to study God's Word we will gain a clear understanding of the wrath of God unleashed when His people become stubbornly disobedient. God repeatedly says, 'When' and 'If', not whatever! We are mistaken if we do not believe we will suffer the consequences of our sin.

**Jeremiah 29:**<sup>10</sup>For thus says the Lord; "only when Babylon's seventy years are completed will I visit you, and I will fulfil to you My promise and bring you back to this place. <sup>11</sup>For surely I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope. <sup>12</sup>Then when you call upon Me and come and pray to Me, I will hear you. <sup>13</sup>When you search for Me, you will find Me; if you seek Me with all your heart. <sup>14</sup>I will let you find Me, says the Lord, and I will restore your fortunes and gather you from all the nations and all the places where I have driven you, says the Lord, and I will bring you back to the place from which I sent you into exile.

God has a plan and purpose for everyone; He both disciplines and restores according to His Word. But it is our choice to follow God's blueprint for our lives or replace it with our own. If we were to stop and contemplate the situation of the world at this time, would we say that we are being disciplined in exile or being brought back into the fold?

**John 13:**<sup>34</sup>I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. <sup>35</sup>By this everyone will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.

Jesus commands us to Love one another and made things as simple as He could for us by summing up the whole Ten Commandments of God in one. Are we demonstrating His command among us? Do we treat other believers in God's house with respect, listen to their views, and prayerfully consider what they say and do? Are we truly demonstrating love by being honest, open and pastoral in our response, whether to discipline or encourage? What does the world find when they open the doors of the church and look in?

**Revelation 21:**<sup>3</sup>And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “See, the home of God is among mortals, He will dwell with them; they will be His peoples, and God Himself will be with them; <sup>4</sup>He will wipe every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more, for the first things have passed away.” <sup>5</sup>And the One who was seated on the throne said, “See, I am making all things new.” Also He said, “Write this, for these words are trustworthy and True.” <sup>6</sup>Then He said to me, “It is done! I Am the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end. To the thirsty I will give water as a gift from the spring of the water of life. <sup>7</sup>Those who conquer will inherit these things, and I will be their God and they will be My children. <sup>8</sup>But as for the cowardly, the faithless, the polluted, the murderers, the fornicators, the sorcerers, the idolaters, and all liars, their place will be in a lake that burns with fire and sulphur, which is the second death.”

God makes it brutally clear that He will discipline the ones He loves and sentence those working against His Word to eternal death. This may be uncomfortable to read in God's Word but it is an unavoidable Truth nevertheless. I can only hope and pray that God will not find me wanting on that day! The people called Methodist have a very challenging prayer intended to be said every year as a renewal of personal commitment to obey the Word of God. Sadly, a minority found this too much to sign up for and insisted on an alternative watered down version less challenging to their conscience. However, I believe that the original wording is intended to make people think and examine their own conscience. Without a reminder to scrutinise our attitudes and behaviour alongside the plumb-line of God's Word and example of Jesus, we are all in danger of going astray. If individual people in the church wander off the 'right' path unchallenged, others are likely to follow. Chaos ensues, righteousness gives way to compromise and Truth is no longer spoken or heard. What then would the Body of Christ have to offer in the world? God's Word is 'TRUSTWORTHY and TRUE' What He says will be. 'God will make all things new!' In the beginning was God, and at the end God will be waiting for us. What we do in between will make all the difference to our new beginning or our final demise! Let us then begin 2021 by renewing our covenant with God and try, by God's grace, to remain faithful to the promises contained within it. **Amen!**

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**The Methodist Covenant Prayer: MWB page 290:**

Heavenly Father; I am no longer my own but Yours; put me to what You will, rank me with whom You will; put me to doing, put me to suffering; let me be employed for You or laid aside for You; exalted for You or brought low for You; let me be full, let me be empty; let me have all things, let me have nothing. I freely and wholeheartedly yield all things to Your pleasure and disposal. And now, glorious and blessed God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, You are mine and I am Yours, so be it! And the covenant now made on earth, let it be ratified in heaven, to the glory of God; Father, Son and Holy Spirit. **Amen!**

“And I said to the man who stood at the gate of the year, ‘Give me a light that I may tread safely into the unknown’ and he replied, ‘Go out into the darkness and put your hand into the hand of God, that shall be to you better than light and safer than a known way.’” *Minnie L. Haskins.*

**May one and all enjoy a blessed and fulfilling New Year.**

Yours in Christ Jesus, Janice

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**“I know the plans I have for you”**

**Jeremiah 29:11** by Freda Hanbury Allen

The love of God a perfect plan  
Is planning now for thee,  
It holds 'a future hope,'  
Which yet you cannot see.

Yet He is planning all the while,  
Unerringly He guides  
The life of those, who hold His will  
More dear than all besides.

Amid the shadows here He works  
The plan designed above,  
'A future and a hope' for you  
In His exceeding love.

Though veiled as yet, one day your eyes  
Shall see His plan unfold,  
And clouds that darkened once the path  
Shall shine with Heaven's gold.

I have an heritage of bliss,  
Which yet I may not see;  
The Hand that bled to make it mine,  
Is keeping it for me.

Though for a season, in the dark,  
He asks your perfect trust,  
Even that you in surrender 'lay  
You treasure in the dust,'

Trust were not trust if you could see  
The ending of the way,  
Nor could you learn His songs by night,  
Were life one radiant day.

'A future' – abiding fruit,  
With loving kindness crowned;  
'A hope' – which shall your own transcend,  
As heaven the earth around.

Enriched to all eternity  
The steadfast soul shall stand,  
That, 'unoffended,' trusted Him  
Who all life's pathway planned.

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### **January Calendar:**

**1<sup>st</sup>** New Year's Day-Bank Holiday UK  
**6<sup>th</sup>** Epiphany  
**18<sup>th</sup>** Martin Luther King Jr Day USA  
**26<sup>th</sup>** Australia Day