

Dear Friends,

Here we are at the start of another Methodist New Year. A time when those moving to new appointment start! It is a joy to be able to welcome Nick Wood into our Circuit and I trust that we are all looking forward to getting to know him and Suzannah. There is another change in our Circuit with the Revd Janice Morgan who has now moved from being Minister Without appointment to becoming a Supernumerary. Janice will be continuing her retreat work and ministry at Half Acre.

A New year brings a lot of new starts. I tend to have a Methodist diary, which are available to buy this time of year (I am not on commission)! It is more helpful to me than having a diary which starts in January.

It's a slightly strange experience, isn't it, to thumb through an old diary? It's like looking into a window of time that once represented the future but now concerns the past. Of course, many of our diaries over the past year have been full of cancelations and postponements. In other years however, there are engagements, events, appointments, anniversaries and so forth that you once anticipated are now either memories or long-since forgotten: twelve months of your life that together comprise another chapter in your continuing story. What is the plot that binds all those chapters together, that gives meaning and unity to every passing year? From the writer of psalm 89, the answer is simple: 'the faithfulness of God.' It's a wonderful testimony echoed in the much-loved words of the hymn writer Thomas Chisholm:

- 1 Great is thy faithfulness, O God my Father,
there is no shadow of turning with thee ;
thou changest not, thy compassions, they fail not ;
as thou hast been thou for ever wilt be :
Great is thy faithfulness ! Great is thy faithfulness !
Morning by morning new mercies I see ;
all I have needed thy hand hath provided.
Great is thy faithfulness, Lord, unto me.
- 2 Summer and winter, and springtime and harvest,
sun, moon and stars in their courses above,
join with all nature in manifold witness
to thy great faithfulness, mercy and love :
- 3 Pardon for sin and a peace that endureth,
thine own dear presence to cheer and to guide ;
strength for today and bright hope for tomorrow,
blessings all mine, with ten thousand beside !

Thomas O. Chisholm (1866–1960)

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That's the confidence with which we say farewell to one year and prepare to step out into another. No one knows what it will bring -laughter or tears, health or sickness, triumph, or disappointment. What we do know is that whatever it brings, whatever we face, God will be with us in it, to the end of time and beyond.

How do you greet the thought of another year? Does it thrill you with a sense of new beginnings or does it bring an uneasy sense of time passing faster than you'd like it to? Hopefully it's the former, but on occasions over the coming months we'll probably all see time as a foe rather than a friend. When life is good, we want it to stand still so that we can hang on to it for ever - only, of course, we can't, and those special moments soon become distant memories. When life is busy, we want more time, for there simply isn't enough of it to go round. When life is dull, bringing yet more of the same old routine, time drags and appears to go on for ever. For a host of reasons, we can end up yearning for extra time or wishing it away, and in each case, we fail to appreciate the time we have.

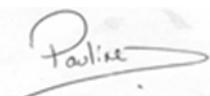
How, then, do we escape from that impasse? Let me suggest three points to keep in mind. First, no matter what our responsibilities, we must learn to take things at a more leisurely pace, building into each day a few moments to be still in the presence of God. Second, we need to take things as they come, letting go of worries about the future or regrets concerning the past and remembering that each moment is God's gift. Third, we must remember that we live in the context not simply of our brief human span, but of God's eternity. In other words, quite literally, we have all the time in the world, and more! Yes, we still occasionally end up chasing our tails, wishing we could stop the clock or wondering why its hands seem to move so slowly, but we have also learnt to appreciate the time God has given and so to appreciate life to the full.

We look at our hands,
at the lines running through them,
each one unique,
each one special to God:
and we thank our Creator for life.

We look at our bodies,
at the differences between us,
each one unique,
each one special to God:
and we thank our Creator for life.

We look at our church,
this body of people,
each one unique,
each one special to God:
and we thank our Creator for life.
Amen.

Every Blessing

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Pauline".