

Bennochy church 1st January 2012

Midnight strikes, a fleeting cusp of time, a point that is neither 'last year' nor 'next year', a moment from which to look forward and to look back. Like Janus, the two-faced god, able to look back and forward at the same time. Traditionally this is a moment for reflection, what has been and what is to come, those resolutions, most never kept! What is it about New Year that make us act in such a way? Is it a kind of fleeting suspension of time, where we are, in some way, taken out of our own reality, to look down on our own lives, and ask searching questions, to recall memories and wonder what the future holds?

When we look back, what pattern do we see? The writer of Ecclesiastes, sometimes described as the preacher, seems to say that there is no meaningful pattern to life. It is simply that for everything there is a season, and if there is a divine purpose, God has not told us, so we should live life to the full and enjoy its mysteries.

Everything is here; these words speak of every situation we might encompass in our own lives. They represent a kaleidoscope of things which come to us unasked and outwith our control (birth, death, war, peace) as well as moments we can choose (to speak or to be silent).

So when we look back, do we notice the transitory nature of life, as the preacher did? Of course we do. That is our experience of being human. So it is natural that he begins with the basics of our existence, birth and death. *We are like the grass... it withers, we are no more enduring than grass, but the word of our God endures forever. (Isaiah 40)*

When we look back, do we see this rich tapestry of life, as part of who we are? Sorrow, joy, mourning and dancing; loving, finding, loss, what we hold onto and what we throw away, relationships lost and restored, silence, talking and all the emotions of life. These are what our memories are made of and make us who we are. None are set aside or forgotten. *No man is an island entire of itself.* We are what we are because of our relationships with others.

When we look back, do we realise that we are different from the person who heard the midnight hour strike last year. The darkness did not last forever. The pain did subside. The anger did fade. We rejoiced and we laughed.

So where does all this come from, this lack of pattern and control. The preacher says it comes from God. **(See v11)** How we would love to know, just a glimpse, of what will happen! It is not within our power to know, so let us not worry, enjoy life, it is God's gift to us. *Do not worry about tomorrow, it will have enough worries of its own (Matthew 6)* It is so hard to live in the moment.

It is God alone who controls time. We cannot live forever. God does. We cannot add or take away from life. God can. The cycle of life is in his hands. Not ours. **(See v15)**

Well that is life sorted. Relax and hand it over to God. If only it was that easy! To live is to face inevitable change, sudden, or over an extended period. Those challenging times of loss, “pulling up”, “tearing down”, the “throwing away”, times when things cannot be “mended”, where we have no words to describe or share our situation, times of “hate” and “war”. *Jesus said, take my yoke, it is easy, the yoke is light* (Matthew 11). A burden not taken away, but a burden shared, so that we can still stand under the load.

The preacher is not saying that life is futile, simply moving from one experience to another, in some random fashion.

Underneath it all, it is about recognising that God is in control and part of that control, is offering us choices, and even in the situations of life where we have no control, God is there. The challenge is to listen to God above the noise of the world and discern how we should live, beyond midnight and into the future of this New Year. Is this not what faith is all about?

The mystery of travelling into an unknown future, knowing its secrets are held by God alone. The realisation that the cycle of life continues, knowing we are not in control, God is, and knowing that our future hope comes only in Christ.

he will live with them, and they will be their God. He will wipe away all tears from their eyes. There will be no more death, no more grief or crying or pain. The old things have disappeared. Then the one who sits on the throne said, “And now I make all things new!” *(Revelation 21: 3b-5a)* Amen.