

Reflections at New Year - 2nd January 2022

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[0 : 0 0] hey everyone my name's matt the vigorous and john's and as 2022 well and truly kicks into gear a very happy new year to you our hopes are that this year will not only be new but improved as 2021 has been a challenging 12 months to say the least but let's pray that with fair winds and following seas 2022 might just be a year of realignment of restoration of renewal for us and for our world yes we're very much living through uncertain times still as we know but with the dawning of a new year it gives us an opportunity to both look back and to look forward with god placing our past our present and our future well and truly into those holiest of hands i'm going to pass over to ruth in a moment who's going to lead us through some reflections for this the start of our new year and so god we pray that in our time together now we may know your way your truth and your life leading us on and shaping all we're about we ask thank you god amen hello everyone it's so great to be speaking to you even if it's via youtube my name's ruth and i'm the curate at st john's community church just in case you haven't met me yet and i'm talking to you a little bit about reflection at the new year at this time of year it can feel a bit like a threshold between the past and the future new year's is kind of a doorway moment where there's just a pause before you give up last year and say it's been let it be and before you anticipate and plan the future sometimes this kind of doorway moment can lead to a deep sense of reflection reflection about where life has taken you so far how you've changed where you want to be and how you feel about those changes and ultimately who you want to be and i guess over recent years there's been a danger that led by bridget jones people tend to develop new year's resolutions which have often been about aspiring to a very particular understanding of what life should be like so i guess bridget jones resolved to lose those last 20 pounds put last night's pants in the laundry basket and find a nice sensible boyfriend and perhaps like bridget jones when you look at the new year you want to achieve certain milestones which make you feel more successful or more seen maybe you'd like to aspire to get to that promotion or to dress better or to get married and i guess i kind of want to resist this new year's self-improvement program because ultimately a lot of these resolutions can be rooted in shame shame about your body shame about your house shame about your life and i think god longs for all of us to live free from shame and to live abundantly so that little voice that says you aren't beautiful enough and that you should take up less space that you should aspire to a particular kind of life and a particular kind of relationship i want to say to that voice which says these things that voice isn't coming from god god has made you well and you're good in the eyes of god no matter how much laundry there is across your bedroom floor right now shame is never the voice of god that voice that says you're not good enough comes metaphorically from the snake in the garden of eden so we know it isn't ever the voice of god so perhaps when we consider this radical point of stepping from one year to another looking forward and back perhaps we should consider this alongside

the story of the road to emmaus you might know this one it's one of the more well-known stories and it's from the very end of luke's gospel chapter 24 the story starts just after jesus has died and after the women have discovered that jesus has risen but when the 12 male disciples hear that jesus has risen from the women they don't believe them they think the women must have gone mad for a moment or be making something up two of these male disciples who didn't believe the women are walking out of jerusalem towards emmaus they're probably talking in hushed urgent tones you know the way you do when something particularly troubling has happened to someone close to you they're probably also walking on their own and looking at other people a bit suspiciously because jesus has just been killed and so it's not safe to be a disciple of jesus right now especially not in jerusalem and you know when you're scared and you're not really sure what's going on so you kind of keep to yourself more and back off from other people well i imagine that that is a little bit how the disciples were kind of just on the edge muttering to each other so they probably jumped a bit when a stranger walked up to them and started walking in step beside them and that stranger who is jesus says something like what is it you're both talking about so intently and these disciples have been trying to make sense of everything that had happened all the things that they believed about jesus and god and the messiah and trying to reconcile this with the ending of jesus dying on the cross like a common criminal they were probably saying something like if this is how it all ended i must have gotten it terribly wrong there must have been something i misunderstood perhaps they were even saying how could we have got this so wrong why did we think this man was god or the messiah and so these two disciples walking along the road to emmaus had been looking back over the past few years from a place of fear and disillusionment and that meant instead of seeing hope they were left feeling dejected and even more afraid and they don't even recognize jesus they just see him as a stranger but this stranger jesus who they don't recognize listens to the story they've told him even though they're telling the story from a place of fear and jesus tells the story back to them explaining where the hope is and where the sense is in the story when they've forgotten to see the hope and the brightness later when these disciples stop and eat food together with jesus which is always and everywhere a holy act because it's the kind of intimacy jesus chose to be remembered in then they realize who it is and initially they aren't completely overjoyed they're a little bit taken aback but then afterwards they say we felt our hearts warm we felt that we were comfortable so it must have been him that's how we knew it was him and when there's that moment of togetherness without fear or without desperately trying to make sense of everything that's happened the disciples have a prayerful moment where the focus is completely on the present on god and on the warmth of a shared meal and then the disciples recognize who jesus is ultimately their hope is restored they head back to jerusalem and god is no longer needed there and so jesus disappears from sight so perhaps instead of new year's resolutions we should try something a bit more revolutionary let's take the opportunity to look back over the past year but let's not look with the eyes of shame or fear because if we tell the story of the past year from the perspective of shame or fear there's a danger we make the story into a twisted version of reality let's try and it is hard especially with some of the things that have happened this year to look back at our year without judgment and just let it be after all the year has ended and what's been done has been done and what has not been done has not been done when we look forward let's not consider where we've not been

enough instead think of this as a shift in the path in front of us which particular path will we take is this path leading us towards god and towards hope or is it a path that's leading us in a direction which makes finding god and finding hope more complicated either response is fine you can always shift the direction you're moving in you just need to be realistic about where you are where you're going and how that's shaping you remember when we meet the disciples at the road to emmaus they're walking away from the good news of the resurrection walking away from the other disciples and feeling fearful and hopeless after meeting jesus in the breaking of bread they immediately head back to jerusalem with a sense of hope and direction so i'm going to lead you in a version of a reflective exercise that i try and do every week called the examine it's a very ancient prayer which looks back and offers the future and the past to god this is something that i personally find very helpful but it might not be for you do feel free to go with it maybe find a pencil and paper i know when i'm a bit on edge or struggling to concentrate i write my responses to all these prompts down just to force myself to focus so before we start let's make space for god to be god take some time don't try and fill it or talk into it i sometimes like to light a candle and sit on the floor perhaps you'll find a good place to start to be saying the lord's prayer or just quietly humming a song now let's take a few moments to think of a few things that make you say yes to where you are to who you are and what you are right now a few things you're grateful for so for example today i'm grateful for the way that my sisters make me laugh for the glorious taste of the first coffee of the morning and for the really upbeat pop punk music powering me up so i can write this what are you grateful for it could be a small thing like the feeling of your lungs expanding with air or the warmth of your feet in a particular pair of socks starting with gratitude really helps me when i'm praying a reflective prayer because it helps me accept where i'm starting from and reach out to god i guess i think it's a bit like looking at a compass or seeing where everything is on google maps sometimes when i'm struggling to concentrate i end up writing all the things i'm grateful for down starting with at least three so take a few moments to breathe to say yes to where you are and to stand in the doorway between the past and the present now next i would take the time to ask god for the mercy grace and love to look back over the past year and to see where my spirit has shifted and who i am has shifted and my relationship with god for example have i grown despondent lately am i quieter than i used to be have i snapped at people more frequently am i more peaceful do i feel more confident am i struggling to get out of bed in the morning am i lazier or more anxious needy prayerful loving forgiving despairing hopeful preoccupied fearful relaxed bitter or accepting

in what ways have i changed over the last year now realistically there'll be a lot of ways that you might have changed in the past few days let alone the past year i guess looking back personally i feel i might have got more confident particularly in the last six months i guess being here has really helped in the couple of years before this one i had a bit of a dip in confidence i also think i've got more cheerful and prayerful but i may also feel that in some ways i put up a bit more of a barrier between myself and other people i wear a little less of my heart on my sleeve than i used to i've also sometimes been less patient and on occasions less accepting of other people i'm still pretty hopeful but instead of my hope always coming naturally like the first breath in the morning sometimes it's something i have to cling on to a more embattled determined hope than before what about you how have you changed or shifted over the last year don't judge these changes just acknowledge them write them down if it helps feel free to pause this and take as much time as you need now when you've got quite a few shifts over the past year see which ones you think might be the most significant there may be a couple or just one substantial change i think for me the bigger changes in myself are the slight difference to the way i'm clinging to hope the change in confidence and the new and slightly different boundaries between myself and other people so when you look back at these significant changes ask how these shifts in your spirit have changed you over the past year how have they shaped your life and your relationship with god and other people ask god to show you god's perspective on those shifts which might be different from yours all of these shifts come from a combination of places and some of it is god ask god to show you which part in the shift of your spirit have come from god and which don't so when i think about the way my sense of hope has changed over the past year i can see it's lost a little of its childish innocence i feel less like my hope is frolicking in a big open field with god some of that is just the reality of growing up hope is a little less easy especially in a global pandemic but i'm clutching to it in a way that's more determined and resilient and i guess part of that is probably a good sign coming from god a sign of my faith maturing and accepting that i don't always have to get the feels to know god is there with me i can clutch to god even when it's not something i naturally fall into but i guess another part of this shift has come from the vulnerability and unpredictability of the last year so i've opted for a hope that i have more control over as there are lots of things in a global pandemic that i can't control this part's not from god what about you where have the shifts in your spirit come from take some time to think about this write about it if it helps feel free to pause this and take as much time as you need now you've thought about this take some time to thank god for the shifts in your spirit which have come from god

and if there are parts of these shifts or shifts that are not from god or don't feel like they're from god you can ask for healing and help with these bits god is always there to heal you i remember for a long time there was someone who i was really struggling to forgive and it hung over my whole life like a fog numbing me eventually i went on a long walk to a place that kind of felt holy which was somehow necessary to find the space inside me to let god in and to let god heal me and while there was no radical moment of transformation gradually the fog finned and i felt like a weight was lifted from me you could pray something like thank you for the growth loving god thank you for starting to heal this wound thank you for giving me the grace to accept i must move on thank you for helping me feel more confident in my relationship with you feel free to pause this and take as much time as you need now that you've offered the shifts to god now that you've offered the shifts to god the next thing i would do is to ask god to show me what i'm called to do about the way i've shifted and changed over the last year should i feed the shifts in my spirit working towards further growth in this direction or should i try and shift the shift turn around and go back working towards changing course gradually moving my attitude adjusting my behavior and so on perhaps there's someone a friend a friend a family member a mentor or godparent that you could talk to about the shifts in your spirit over the past year perhaps they're indicating that there's something that you're called to do or someone you're called to be at this point i'd suggest that you just write it all out or dream it all out think about the path in front of you as it curls up a high mountain or into a deep dusky valley imagine what would happen if you were to continue growing in the way that you've been growing over the past year where would that lead you who would you be would you want to continue feeding this path or just gradually take a slightly different direction feel free to pause this and take as much time as you need at the end of this prayer time if you have a particular feeling about what you're called to do or who you are called to be if and only if you feel called to do so it can be a good time to make a promise to follow your calling to offer god a yes to that eternal question will you be this for me but not everyone is called to be in a particular place at every particular time sometimes life is just happening and you're just called to be the best person you can be in the life you're given i think that is much more common than most people would acknowledge at the end of all this and it has been a lot of reflection i find it helpful to listen to a song or to just sit back slightly in silence then when you're ready to face the present and say yes to the now again to step through the doorway into the future i sometimes find that i should start by returning to things i'm grateful for then i make the sign of the cross or blow the candle out you might find these things helpful or you might not do whatever seems right and natural to you

[20 : 13] i must confess that if i've written it all out and it's been a particularly vulnerable prayer time i do tend to burn the piece of paper i'm writing on and that might be good advice too this is as i said a very old way of praying called the examine and if it's something you're interested in then i'd love to direct you to some great resources there's a really good phone app called pray as you go but it may not be for you i guess at these doorway moments it's sometimes nice to just try something a bit different fantastic stuff ruth thank you so much for that and i gotta say in the six months ruth has been with us so far she's been such a joy such a blessing to us already there's no new worship song for us this week as a number of the band have generally been under the weather with a mix of covid and other seasonal illnesses but do dip into the worship songs playlist here on our saint john's youtube channel where there are now some 73 songs for you to take your pick from maybe stick one or two on after this video if you wish in terms of church gatherings going forward there won't be an in-person morning service next sunday the 9th of january at saint john's we're going to remain cautious this early into the new year with all the unknowns on stats and cases following christmas and so on but also with various key folks who'd normally be involved in services at saint john's being under the weather holding a morning gathering feels a step too far for next week however there will be an evening in-person gathering at six o'clock next sunday at saint john's as that's a slightly easier setting and number to manage that'll be a time to share and pray together if you fancy that next sunday evening at six o'clock here on youtube though we will therefore be back with another session next sunday so do tune in next week in your pjs or whatever attire you feel is appropriate lotty's going to put together a shooting stars youtube session for our younger ones here as well and i'll keep us posted next week on here on facebook and our church website about sundays to come all of which means though it's time to wind things up for today thanks very much again to ruth for her reflections for us and once again a happy new year to you as 2022 begins to take shape hopefully see you here next week but until then a final word of blessing for us and so may the blessing of god almighty the father the son and the holy spirit be with you and all those who god has given you to love and journey alongside both today as this new year unfolds and forevermore amen you