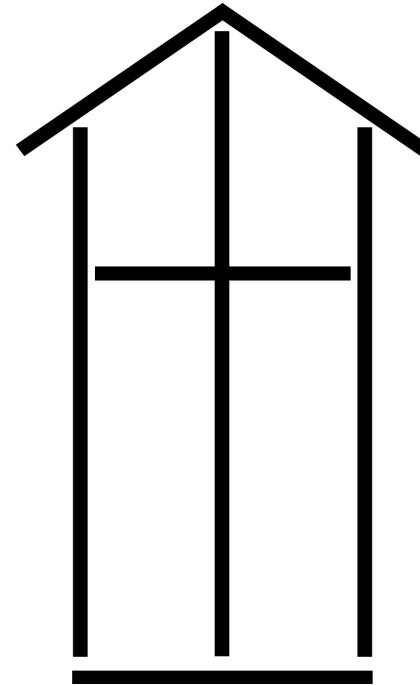


beyond fatigue,
beyond what would
tempt you
from the way.
There are vows
that only you
will know:
the secret promises
for your particular path
and the new ones
you will need to make
when the road
is revealed
by turns
you could not
have foreseen.
Keep them, break them,
make them again;
each promise becomes
part of the path,
each choice creates
the road
that will take you
to the place
where at last
you will kneel
to offer the gift
most needed—
the gift that only you
can give—
before turning to go
home by
another way.

—Jan Richardson

“The land you are crossing over to occupy is a land of hills and valleys... The eyes of the Lord are always on it, from the beginning of the year to the end of the year.”

—Deuteronomy 11:11-12



NEW YEAR'S EVE
2024
NORTHMINSTER BAPTIST CHURCH

Do not remember the former things, or consider the things of old. I am about to do a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it? I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert.

—Isaiah 43:18-19

For Those Who Have Far to Travel

If you could see
the journey whole,
you might never
undertake it,
might never dare
the first step
that propels you
from the place
you have known
toward the place
you know not.
Call it
one of the mercies
of the road:
that we see it
only by stages
as it opens
before us,
as it comes into
our keeping,
step by
single step.
There is nothing
for it
but to go,
and by our going
take the vows
the pilgrim takes:
to be faithful to
the next step;
to rely on more
than the map;
to heed the signposts
of intuition and dream;
to follow the star
that only you
will recognize;
to keep an open eye
for the wonders that
attend the path;
to press on
beyond distractions,

Prayers of Confession

“My own heart let me more have pity on;
let me live to my sad self hereafter kind,”

—Gerard Manley Hopkins

About what from this past year must you extend pity to your own heart?
What mistake or failure are you holding onto, and what would you need
to do to truly let it go? What amends must be made, what restitution
sought, what apology offered, what forgiveness given or received?

Most merciful God,
we confess that we have sinned against you in thought, word, and deed,
by what we have done,
and by what we have left undone.
We have not loved you with our whole heart; we have not loved our
neighbors as ourselves. We are truly sorry and we humbly repent.
For the sake of your Son Jesus Christ,
have mercy on us and forgive us;
that we may delight in your will,
and walk in your ways,
to the glory of your Name. Amen.

—*Book of Common Prayer*

Lord our God,
In our sin we have avoided your call.
Our love for you is like a morning cloud,
like the dew that goes away early.
Have mercy upon us.
Deliver us from judgement.
Bind up our wounds and revive us through Jesus Christ our Lord.

—*A New Zealand Prayer Book*

Opening Reflection

The Christian life is lived between memory and hope. There are certain
times and seasons in which the truth of this “in-betweenness” of life and
faith is most palpable, and though it is not a holiday within the church,
New Year’s Eve is one of those days.

New Year’s comes each year as a mile marker in our long life’s journey,
a threshold through which we pass from one time and place into another.
So we are offered the opportunity to reflect, to remember and take stock
of what we have seen and heard and done over the previous turning of
the earth around the sun, and look ahead with intention to what we will
do and who we will be in the turning to come.

The great preacher Peter Gomes once said that the gospel, for him, was
that “we do not have to be who we are.” That people are capable of
change; that we, ourselves, are capable of change. What good news this
is. It’s also true that while most real change begins with a conscious
decision to do so, it does not happen all at once. It happens slowly, over
time, one small, thoughtful act at a time, until “in-betweenness” gives
way—likely without us even knowing it—to something new.

It is in anticipation of this newness that we gather at the threshold of this
night. In the pages that follow, you will find prompts to reflect on what
has happened in the year we prepare to leave behind, in the hopes that
these memories will propel you with hope into the year that is to come.

Reflections on the New Year

And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time.

—T.S. Eliot, *Little Gidding*

We think of time as linear, ever moving forward. And yet, we keep it in more of a circle, cycling through the same days each year. As we again “arrive where we started,” what do you see differently this time around?

"It is really true what philosophy tells us, that life must be understood backwards. But with this, one forgets the second proposition, that it must be lived forwards. A proposition which, the more it is subjected to careful thought, the more it ends up concluding precisely that life at any given moment cannot really ever be fully understood...because there is no single moment where time stops completely."

—Søren Kierkegaard, *journals*

Looking back on the year that has passed, think of something you didn't understand at the time but now seems more clear. Or perhaps there is something that seemed clear at the time but now seems less so. What is there to be learned?

"The point is that in almost every instance of our lives, our social lives, we are, if we pay attention, in the midst of an almost constant, if subtle, caretaking. Holding open doors. Offering elbows at crosswalks. Letting someone else go first. Helping with the heavy bags. Reaching what's too high, or what's been dropped. Pulling someone back to their feet. Stopping at the car wreck, at the struck dog...This caretaking is our default mode and it's always a lie that convinces us to act or believe otherwise. Always."

—Ross Gay, *The Book of Delights*

In what ways—large, or perhaps especially small—have you been taken care of this year?

In what ways have you taken care of others?

“Belief likewise depends on memory. “I believe” means: “I remember.” For what is belief? Every one of us, at least once in our lifetime, has been able to perceive the existence of the Creator. Every one of us, at least once, has merited a glimpse of the beauty, the serenity, and the strength which flow from the souls of those who have walked with God. However, such feelings and inspirations are not common occurrences. In the lives of most people they are as meteors which flare up for a moment and then disappear from sight. There are, however, people for whom these flashes ignite with them a light which will never be extinguished. Faith means: If you ever once merit that the Hidden One appears to you, be faithful to [that One] all the days of your life. Faith means: To guard forever the echo which once burst upon the deep recesses of your soul.”

—Abraham Joshua Heschel, *Moral Grandeur and Spiritual Audacity*

What from this past year must you remember?

What memories would you hold onto and add to the story of your faith?

What doubts or fears have you kept, or perhaps still have, that would keep your faith honest?

When or how did “the Hidden One” appear to you this past year?

How will you guard that experience in the year ahead?

“How we spend our days is, of course, how we spend our lives. What we do with this hour, and that one, is what we are doing.”

—Annie Dillard, *The Writing Life*

What is one thing you can commit to attempting each day in the coming year in the hope that it will be a part of how you spend your life?