Dear friends,

And so we approach 2021!

You might have seen the ads and jokes which have been around: “I’m not putting my clock back this Autumn, I don’t want an extra second, let alone an extra hour, of this year” … “All I want for Christmas is 2021”. 2020 seems destined to be a year we remember for all the wrong reasons…a year which we are all too eager to see the back of…and yet…

Dear friends of mine had the practice all through their married life of sitting together on New Year’s Eve or New Year’s Day and giving thanks for the blessings of the year just past. Whether the year had been tough, or joyous, or somewhere in between, it was a key time for them. If we need evidence, science has now provided it, that the practice of gratitude is a key part of maintaining good mental health. What God’s people have known since the earliest times, is now part of everyday conversation. It helps to count your blessings. Paul writes “Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.”

So as you read this, I invite you to pause for a moment and, if you can, get a cup or glass of your favourite beverage and something simple and sweet you can eat – apple, sultanas, a biscuit…

You might choose to sit somewhere quiet for a while and hold in mind those things for which you give thanks … particularly those things which are the ordinary, simple blessings of each day. Think back over the year just past (for many of us this will need courage, as it has been very hard), and notice those times when you have known yourself loved… by God or by others…and those times when you have been able to extend loving-kindness to yourself, or to others. Taste the sweetness of those memories, and enjoy the sweet treat you have brought into your praying space.

*[I am inspired by the Jewish practice of eating sweet things, like slices of apple dipped in honey, at new year, symbolising hope for a sweet year ahead, and offer grateful thanks to Michele Guinness whose book ‘The Heavenly Party’ continues to shape my thinking about the ways we weave life and faith together]*

A similar activity is included in this week’s podcast too, as a part of deliberately moving from one year to the next in God’s company. I hope it is helpful to pause and give thanks…

Blessed are you, O Lord our God,

who gives us life and breath,

who has watched over us since our birth,

who brings us to the threshold of this new year.

In the quietness we give you thanks

for those things which bring sweetness to our lives…

May we live this year with eyes wide open

to the blessings of each day

Amen

Praying peace for you and yours in the days to come, Jo