

## **A reflection at the end of 2020 on the eve of 2021 by Reverend Michelle Godbold**

As we come to the end of 2020 we can not help but reflect on a year that has been a year like no other we have experienced. As we welcomed in 2020, a year ago, we could not have imagined the road the world would've travelled in the time that has now past.

It has been a year of uncertainty and fear, a year of pain and anguish, a year of isolation and boredom and year that has led us to reconsider life as we had known it in the light of the new normal that we find ourselves in. A normal that is refraining from physical contact and even being close to one another, a normal that looks out at the world from behind a mask as the world looks back also half covered and with muted expression, a normal that has restrictions on freedoms and past times. A normal that we don't want but the alternative is something that we want much less.

2020 is a year that many of us will be glad to see the back of, but as we do so it means we have to look forward. As we look forward how do we feel? What questions do we have? Do we have expectations for what 2021 will hold?

To look forward with still so much unknown is a difficult thing to do, not least when our optimism and hope of improvement has been dashed multiple times over the last year. I don't know about you but 2020 is not a year I would want to repeat but at the same time I am hesitant to welcome in the new year for none of us know what is around the next corner, just as we didn't last year.

It has been a really rough, really horrible, really painful year for us all in one way or another, it's a year which many of us will be glad to see the back of. But at the same time, through the ravaging of all that we know by Covid the light of love has shone through. We have all become more aware of our fellow human being. There have been selfless acts of kindness, there have been sacrificial acts by those key workers to keep the country running and safe and to treat those who have been affected by this dreadful disease. There has been a sense of loving unity, which has been garnered by our increased awareness of our need for our fellow human beings. There has been immense generosity and in the sadness, grief and fear there have been moments of peace and joy which have been realised in the most unlikely of places. This year has been such a dark year but the light of love has never been put out. It has never been put out but, more than that, it has been intensified.

In the very beginning of the crisis we found ourselves disorientated and fearful. As it progressed we became frustrated, wondering how long this was going to last for. Back then the turn of the year seemed so far off and yet here we are. We have weathered the storm thus far, sadly so many have lost their lives along the way, so many have lost relatives and loved ones, so many have lost their health through the long term effects of covid. The economic impact is huge, so many have lost their livelihoods with still more to come. And still it is not over. It is only natural that we are angry and fed up, it is only right that we lament what could have been instead this year and how this will cast a shadow over the future. It is only right that we ask the question of God 'why?' It is only right that we plead for a future that is more than this, whilst wondering if we things will ever be the way they once were. And so, whilst it is right that we will be glad to see the back of 2020, it is also not surprising that we may approach 2021 with a little trepidation.

There are no answers to our questions. There are no certainties in what we will face, but then there never has been. But what there is, the thing that has always remained unchanged is God's promise of his love. It is a promise that is woven through every text of the bible from first to last page. It is a promise felt in the hearts of those willing to put their trust in him. A promise of deliverance, a promise of protection, a promise of his forgiveness and his blessing and a promise of eternal life.

As we look back through what has been a tough year, in the light of the gospel, we can see God's covenant promise fulfilled. We see where God has been walking alongside us, we can see his outstretched hand inviting us to follow in his way and we can see his faithfulness to us in all that we have faced.

As we await the start of this new year, we listen once again to the words from the book of Jeremiah and as we do so we give thanks for his love for us and we hold on to his covenantal promise, knowing that through the centuries he has never left us and never will.

<sup>11</sup>For surely I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope. <sup>12</sup>Then when you call upon me and come and pray to me, I will hear you. <sup>13</sup>When you search for me, you will find me; if you seek me with all your heart, <sup>14</sup>I will let you find me, says the Lord. (Jer. 29:11-14)

Amen.