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Briefing 96: Wednesday 5th January, 2022.

Dear friends,

Let me start by wishing you all a very happy 2022! I hope that despite the ongoing issues with Covid that you were able to enjoy the Christmas season and managed to have a time of rest and relaxation with friends and family. Judy and I had a houseful and more for a number of days between Christmas and New Year, but it was wonderful to spend time together. We will be taking a break from Thursday for just over a week, but you'll be blessed with Rev Ray Porter preaching in both churches this coming Sunday, and we look forward to seeing you again on our return.

This week and next week I want to reflect a little more on the theme from last Sunday, that of change. Sometimes changes can be very dramatic, as with Jesus overturning the tables of the merchants and moneychangers in the temple, and we'll think more of that below. However, most change happens gradually, sometimes imperceptibly, and we will reflect a little more on that next week.

Change, however, is a fact of life. It's part of being alive. Our circumstances change. Our opportunities change. Our bodies change. Sometimes that change is positive, tending towards growth, increase, improvement. Sometimes change is negative, tending towards decrease, restriction, even death. Sometimes that change happens to us and there is nothing we can do to avoid it. Our part is to deal with that change well and in a Godly, Christ-like manner, trusting God who remains the same even though the *"earth give way and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea."* (Psalm 46) For God can be trusted. His promises are certain. His love is sure. His presence with his children is constant. And his power and rule are so strong that he works his own good purposes out even in the most difficult and darkest of times. Whatever comes this year, for good or ill, if you are in Christ Jesus, you do not need to fear.

At other times, we can and indeed must be instigators of change as we seek to follow Jesus as his disciples and grow in likeness to Jesus. That's what we'll consider very briefly here.

Not long after Judy and I were married we bought a house in need of a great deal of renovation. The previous owners had lived there for well over 40 years. No doubt they had done their best to keep it clean and tidy and keep the garden under control, and I suspect they hardly noticed the change, but through illness and old age the house was in a dreadful state when we moved in.

In the same way our spiritual lives can decline gradually over time. It's not deliberate. We are not walking away from God on purpose, and we continue to attend church, read our Bibles and pray, just perhaps not as much as we once did. But through a lack of focus and care our faith falters, our love for God diminishes, our enjoyment of his grace wanes and sin and cold-heartedness slowly creeps in until God is a by-stander in our lives, an add on, a crutch, rather than the bright morning star by which we live and move.

In such circumstances, a gentle spring clean won't do the trick. Something more dramatic is needed. In that house the heating system, windows, doors and carpets all needed replacing, and every room had to be stripped and redecorated. Sometimes in our lives, whole tables need to be forcefully overturned, and sins need to be firmly put to death so that Jesus might retake his rightful place.

I've known several times like that in my Christian life, times when deep repentance and radical change was required. It was always uncomfortable, always daunting. There was in almost every case, some wavering and prevaricating before taking those first steps, but it was always, always, always worth it. And if that's where you find yourself right now, if your spiritual life feels dry, if God feels distant, if you know there are patterns of thought, speech and behaviour that you know are wrong and need to be changed then let me give you 3 reminders to encourage you to do whatever it takes to walk back into the light of Christ.

1: God's love for you is undiminished. Our hearts may grow cold, his does not. We may prove faithless; he is always true. We may doubt that God will be interested in us anymore, yet our Heavenly Father longs for our return.

2: Jesus' blood cleanses from every sin. No matter what your sin and failings, nor how long they have been part of your life, when you confess your sins and repent from them, forgiveness is yours through Jesus.

3: God's plans for you are good and are for your joy. So often we resist coming to God in repentance because we somehow believe that our sin brings us more joy and comfort than God ever could. How wrong we are. True joy, real hope, lasting pleasure are all only found in God. Trust him and you will taste and see that the Lord is good.

But please don't feel that you need to walk that path alone. One of the reasons the Lord calls us into local church families is that we might strengthen and encourage one another. So as you reach out to God for his help in overturning those tables of sin doubt or unbelief in your life, reach out to a trusted Christian brother or sister. Ask them to pray with you and pray for you. Let us carry one another's burdens, that together we might grow in the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ throughout 2022. Grace and peace,

Dave

IMPORTANT STUFF – DON'T JUST GLANCE- TAKE IT ALL IN!

COVID PROTOCOLS: A reminder. If you sit in a **masked** area of the church, please keep your face coverings on for **the whole service**. If you'd rather sing without a mask, please sit in the 'mask free' areas provided. Government advice is that we take a **lateral flow test** before meeting lots of people. We have lots of free kits in church. Why not take one and use it either on Saturday evening or first thing Sunday morning before you come?

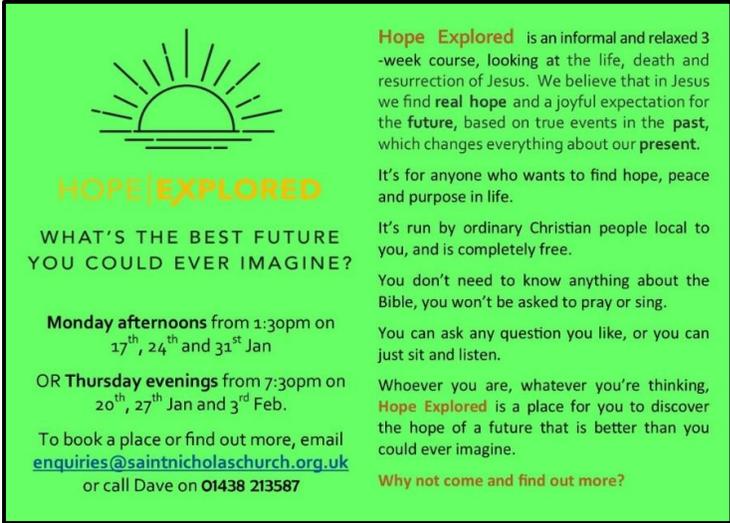
HOPE EXPLORED:

In January we will be running 2 short HOPE EXPLORED courses. Invitations are in church.

If your faith needs a reboot, why not come along?

If your faith is strong, why not come with a friend who needs to hear of the hope Jesus brings?

More details are below or here: [Christianity Explored Ministries: Hope Explored](#)

A green poster for 'Hope Explored' featuring a sun icon at the top. The text on the poster includes: 'HOPE EXPLORED', 'WHAT'S THE BEST FUTURE YOU COULD EVER IMAGINE?', 'Monday afternoons from 1:30pm on 17th, 24th and 31st Jan', 'OR Thursday evenings from 7:30pm on 20th, 27th Jan and 3rd Feb.', 'To book a place or find out more, email enquiries@saintnicholaschurch.org.uk or call Dave on 01438 213587', and 'Why not come and find out more?'. To the right of the poster, there is additional text: 'Hope Explored is an informal and relaxed 3-week course, looking at the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. We believe that in Jesus we find real hope and a joyful expectation for the future, based on true events in the past, which changes everything about our present. It's for anyone who wants to find hope, peace and purpose in life. It's run by ordinary Christian people local to you, and is completely free. You don't need to know anything about the Bible, you won't be asked to pray or sing. You can ask any question you like, or you can just sit and listen. Whoever you are, whatever you're thinking, Hope Explored is a place for you to discover the hope of a future that is better than you could ever imagine.'

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Whoever you are, whatever you're thinking, **Hope Explored** is a place for you to discover the hope of a future that is better than you could ever imagine.

Why not come and find out more?

PRAYER GATHERINGS: Our prayer gatherings have now resumed and our next Prayer Gathering is on Wednesday 12th from 7:45pm. This will be an in-person only meeting. Our next 7-8am early morning zoom prayer will be on Tuesday January 18th. Why not put those dates in your diary now and commit to coming along?

The church will also be open for **visitors and private prayer** on Tuesdays from 2-4pm, Wednesdays from 12noon-2pm and Thursdays from 10am-12 noon. If you'd like to join the band of church sitters, please speak to Karen Walker.

READINGS FOR THE NEXT FEW WEEKS: The readings for the next 3 weeks are as follows:

9th January: Matt 21: 18-27 16th January: Matt 21:28-32 23rd January: Matt 21:33-46

THE FUNERAL OF BARBARA CRAWLEY, who worshipped with us at St Nicholas for many years, will take place on Wednesday 19th January at 1pm. All who knew her are invited to come and join her family in giving thanks for her life.

FLOWER ARRANGING: If you'd like to join the Flower Arranging Team at St Nicholas, please see Chris Chambers – full training is given. More details next week.

Save the date! EVANGELISM TRAINING ON SATURDAY JANUARY 29th January 9:30am-2pm

The London City Mission team are coming to help train us to go out with the Gospel whether that is door to door or reaching out to family and friends (see Karen Walker for more details).