

Dear Friends

There's a story I always tell on the first day of the year. It's about a young lad Jack who two days ago was still only 8yrs old, but next year he will turn 11. {He's already 9, because he was born on New Years Eve. For one day this year he will be 10, and then, on the last day of next year, he will be 11}.

For about 60 years that scenario has appealed to the part of me that loves facts and calculations. The preacher in me, while he wished Jack a happy 9th birthday for yesterday, regards years as not just numbers, and wonders about what Jack will become and do in his tenth and eleventh years. I hope he can look forward to those years as years of belonging and as years spent living knowing that he is loved. I hope he spends them preparing himself to not only be useful but to create options for others. **That's my hope for what you might be doing too**, no matter how many birthdays you have had.

How are you getting on with time, your ever present companion? I've not yet met anyone who isn't getting older.

I was talking some months back with a BNZ phone assistant about all the things that can now be done by Internet Banking. She advised me that these days, if I wanted to, I could change anything about my bank accounts on the internet, **except for my name and my date of birth**. Set me thinking If I wanted to change my date of birth, would I want to move it backwards – and so be already older – or move it forward and so to have had fewer experiences and opportunities. Which direction would you opt for? As for changing my name, who instead would I like to be called? Perhaps George Clooney, as he and I are already so similar.

My initial thought was that if I could choose some of the experiences and workloads to leave out, I'd move it forward. Fewer wrinkles, more hair, more energy. But... you and I know, that those same experiences have contributed to my being such a(supply your own adjectives) me.

I read just today (in the science newsletter *the Smithsonian 27/12/23*) that when an adult of a particular species of Jellyfish (*Turritopsis dohrnii*) sustains damage or becomes stressed, it absorbs its tentacles into its body, becomes a free-floating blob that settles to the seafloor. This blob then morphs into an earlier jellyfish life-stage: a branching, plant-like polyp that in turn releases young jellyfish into the ocean. Effectively, the adult jellyfish turns itself into multiple new babies. Though predators can kill these creatures, none of these particular type of jellyfish ever succumb to old age!

How would it be for you to not face old age, severe conflict or stress? What if the cost of being like that required you to let go of your attachments to life – your tentacles- and let what remains sink to the bottom, hoping that something new and good would come out of the life you had had. A friend of mine is recorded by his followers to have said,

Luke 9:23-26 Message Bible Then he told them what they could expect for themselves: "Anyone who intends to come with me has to let me lead. You're not in the driver's seat—I am. Don't run from suffering; embrace it. Follow me and I'll show you how. Self-help is no help at all. Self-sacrifice is the

way, my way, to finding yourself, your true self. What good would it do to get everything you want and lose you, the real you? If any of you is embarrassed with me and the way I'm leading you, know that the Son of Man will be far more embarrassed with you when he arrives in all his splendour in company with the Father and the holy angels.

I am sure Jesus wasn't thinking about the reproductive practices of a strange Jellyfish. But in 2023, I do intend to strive to be about the way of the Kingdom. It won't require me to change my name or my date of birth, but to be my best self, for others. It will **require me to live in fellowship with you, the friends of Jesus.**

Beginning at 10 am at Trinity Napier Methodist church in Clive Square, this Sunday New Years Day, the friends of Trinity, with the St Pauls Presbyterian congregation (combined at Trinity this week and next), will make a good start, learning about the Way of the Kingdom. Singing, praying listening, pondering and sharing. I'll lead.

I hope to see you there

David Harding, Presbyterian

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