



Pastor's Page

“All Right on the Night”

I had a strong sense of déjà vu as I waited to see if any invites would come my way. Yes it was that night again – the last night of the year and I was determined this time to muscle in on some celebratory shindig. It seemed ages since I'd eaten pineapple chunks and cheese squares from little wooden sticks whilst playing “Give us a clue”! So getting off to an early start I sent a text message to my sister around 9.00am dropping a big hint – she didn't pick it up! I rang my god daughter who chatted happily to me but never asked me what I was doing that night. They were all going to the “Hughes” for a New Years Eve Party! After wishing me Happy New Year she was gone! With my options now fading faster than the old year I got desperate and decided to go round to the local vicarage (which happens to be my brother's house) to see what they were doing. He and my sister in-law were in Oxford but two of my nieces and nephew were there and were inviting some friends over in the evening for a meal. So I had afternoon tea with them all and then returned to my parents for a quiet night in!! Following a stirring episode of “Last of the Summer Wine” as we devoured the last of the mince pies I knew it was going to be a “cosy” New Years Eve! About 10.00pm my parents retired for the night (bless them) and I headed for the kitchen to search for some pineapple junks! (oh the things I get up to when I'm let loose!) Then with the first of the ubiquitous fireworks illuminating the December sky I got ready for my late night shindig!

I accept that a Watch-Night service in a small Baptist church is not something that most people would describe as a shindig. However for me this “get together” (which is a definition of a shindig) at this time with God's family is very precious. It provides the opportunity to thank the Lord for the year that's passed and to commit to him the year that's ahead in the context of worship and in the company of his people.

So as I arrived at the familiar place of worship I knew I was in the right place on this last night of the year. Chatting to one or two people I moved in ready to sit down. As I chose my seat I picked up the song sheet lying there and also the small stone and candle right next to it. “This is different” I thought. And so the service began with a prayer, a reading and then a hymn. Following this the pastor asked us to take the small stone and to think about things that had been a burden to us over this past year and then in our own time to bring the stones (representing those burdens) out to the front and lay them at the foot of the cross. He then asked us to consider our hopes for the New Year and then bring the candles out (representing those hopes) light them, and put those too at the foot of the cross. As I did this simple act I discovered that my burdens and my hopes were two sides of the same coin. But I also realised again the truth of the line that we sang many times before Christmas “The hopes and fears of all the years are met in thee tonight” As I contemplated the year that had now passed and welcomed the year that had just dawned I was so thankful to be in the Lord's house asking for his help on this special night.

Alright, so I didn't find any pineapple chunks and I never played one single game of charades that night but 2009 got off to a great start because I started it with Jesus. And it'll be a great year if I keep him at the centre. Lets all try that! Happy New Year!

4th January 2009