

- *Fintry Watchnight service*

Pebbles Prayer1

- Reflect on the year that is past for you:
 - things that you are thankful for - good times, successes, happiness, health or recovery, strength through hard times...
 - things that have been more difficult - perhaps health, perhaps failures, perhaps relationships that are broken...
- The Christian confidence is that God is concerned for all of our life, for everything that we have travelled through:
 - invite people to come and pick up a pebble for each significant memory from the year that is past...
 - (a little like the Israelites were invited to as they passed through the Jordan, from outside of God's promised land to inside it...)
 - might be good, might be bad
 - take them back to your seat and as we pray reflect on your own memories, bringing them consciously to God
- *Prayer...*

Context

Israelites

- Been rescued by God from Egypt:
 - wandered in the desert under Moses leadership
 - been often unfaithful so that original generation has died out
 - and Moses himself not allowed to enter the promised land because of his failures
 - now entering the land under Joshua's leadership

Us

- End of the year, tendency to look back and to look forward, to make resolutions
 - to assess our own failures and successes
- God gave the Israelites instructions to mark this transition time, for their benefit:
 - pick up rocks from the bed of the Jordan as they crossed (v.3)
 - "set them up" (v.9) and make them into a memorial (v.7)

Looking Back - Establishing our Identity

Israelites

- God was doing two things:
 - first encouraging the Israelites to look back in such a way that they remembered who they were
 - as they established themselves in the land, settled down, forged a new nation, embedded the cultures and customs of a new nation in a new land...
 - ...who were they?
- They were the people who entered the land **there** where the stones stand
 - they were the people who God brought into the land
 - they were the people who had wandered through the desert...
 - they were the people who God had rescued from the Egyptians...
- In their minds eye was to be a **continuous thread** running back to their formation by God:
 - we are God's people
 - we are brought here by him, to this promised land

Us

- Its important that we too establish our identity:
 - who are we?
 - those who remember our salvation?
 - who remember how God has dealt with us in the past?
 - who are rooted in God's shaping of our lives, attitudes, character?

Looking Forward - Establishing our Purpose

Israelites

- The purpose of the whole **picking up a rock thing** was not to make the Israelites backward looking
 - far from it - they were entering a new land, this is a new beginning, no longer a wandering people but a conquering and a settling people...
 - the point of the rocks was not to drag them into the past, but to recalibrate their march forward
 - you need a fixed point from which to navigate...
 - those rocks also gave them that fixed point so they could have clarity of purpose in their new land
 - their future living, their decisions about foreigners in the land, about intermarriage, about government, about boundary disputes, about who gets to settle where - all these needed a fixed point as they established their purpose
- They are God's people, and from their settled identity springs their purposeful living

Us

- So for us too:
 - who are we? **God's saved people**
 - which shapes our priorities, our future living...
 - **because I have been rescued by Jesus Christ, I will...**
 - **because I am loved by Jesus Christ, I will...**
 - **because I am now made holy by the blood of Jesus Christ, I will...**

Acted response, with pebbles piled in the middle...

- Take the pebbles, which earlier perhaps signified memories of the year past
 - and bring them now as hopes and plans for the year ahead
 - build a cairn, as a mini-memorial to the Lord of our commitment to him for the year ahead