

Dear Friends,

The start of a new year is often a time of reflection and consideration. The world tells us that we have moved on from Christmas and the adverts go from promoting over-indulgence to that of diet plans and holidays. It becomes a time of looking forward rather than looking back. However, that isn't always easy and all too easily we can lose sight of the present moment.

Just prior to Christmas I was involved in a couple of conversations about the associations music can have for us. The sleigh bells which accompany so many songs in December immediately take us back to Christmas. For many of us through the rest of the year, a particular piece of music can evoke memories in many different ways, taking us back to the past.

At the same time, stepping out into the garden and seeing the bulbs starting to show often becomes associated with a sense of hope and new life. Once the snowdrops come into flower it seems the early Spring season has started and creation is bursting into life once again. Seeing the primroses in flower in December made me think about how we react when things seem to be slightly out of place in the year.

We are reminded in Hebrews that 'Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever.' We mustn't forget the past and all that means to us and we should look ahead to the coming year with an openness to all that God is doing, and will continue to do. We should also remember that Jesus is the same today and not forget the present.

Where do we find a sense of God in our lives today? Is it in a piece of music where we feel a sense of closeness to God, either through the words or the notes being played? Maybe it's in creation where we step outside and see things differently, by going for a walk, or just looking out into the garden. Maybe it is in a book, through a poem, our hobbies or wherever it might be. We can find Jesus through the peace of the Holy Spirit, who fills our hearts and minds in a new way, or through time seemingly standing still for a period. Maybe it's in the midst of daily life, or when we stop. Wherever it might be, let us give thanks and praise to God who, in Jesus, came to the world to bring us salvation and to draw us close to him.

Wherever we encounter Jesus, let's give thanks to God that he has revealed himself to us. Let's also be open to the new ways in which God may meet us through the Holy Spirit. We may be pleasantly surprised!

During January, we will celebrate our Covenant Service. It is where we reflect on our relationship with God and to recommit ourselves to him. We do this by bringing the past year before God, looking ahead to the future, by acknowledging where we are now and how God is meeting us. It is an important service in our Methodist tradition and one we should come to with open hearts and minds as we look to the time ahead.

May God bless you and your families richly this coming year,
Chris