

Letter from the Vicar - January 2010
View from the Vicarage

Ever new

Happy New Year to you all! It's that time of year when we look, hopefully, to the future with a sense of expectation and joy. Whatever has happened in 2009 this is a new beginning, a chance to start again and to leave behind the past with a new vision, a new vigour, a new outlook.

Sound familiar? Of course it does, because this is the message of hope that we who follow Christ have for every day! There is never a point where we can't start again, when we can't leave who we have been behind and start again. And the way we do this is repentance.

Repentance is an old fashioned word, not one we use very much these days except in the formal prayers of confession which are a part of most of our services, but it still has an important part to play in our everyday Christian lives and a New Year is a good time to think again what it means to us. The word repent is a very old English word which simply means 'to turn around'. The specific meaning is to change direction by 180 degrees and take a new path. In our baptism service we talk about 'turning from sin and turning to Christ' and sometimes we need to take that step of stopping where we are, stopping what we're doing and changing direction.

When the Bible talks about sin it is not concerned with moralising or telling us we are bad people. In Scripture sin is what takes us away from what is good for us, from the purposes of God. It can be seen as either 'missing the mark' and not reaching the standards of love and faith God calls us to or of 'transgressing' (trespassing, as our old translations of the Lord's prayer say) and crossing a boundary from what is right to what is wrong.

If there is anything in our lives which is either falling short or transgressing then now is a good time to get rid of it. Either in our own time before God in prayer, or as part of our collective confession at Church or with a minister of the Church. Yes, even in the Church of England a priest can and will hear confessions and remind us of the forgiveness God offers in absolution — and either The Revd Anne Mills or I will hear confessions upon request.

Most important is to remember that there is nothing we have done that God cannot or will not forgive. It's not just the New Year when we can have a new start, but every day, every minute offers us hope of being made new by God's grace and love. God forgives you, forgive others, forgive yourself.

Alastair