

Letter from the Right Reverend Peter Hancock, Bishop of Bath and Wells For Parish Newsletters - January 2018

In Ancient Roman religion the god of beginnings and endings was Janus. In art and sculpture he is therefore usually depicted as having two faces, since he looks both to the future and to the past. And it is generally believed that the month of January is named after Janus. But looking back and looking forward are also both very much part of the Christian tradition and at the start of a New Year this can be a very helpful thing to do. We so often rush from one thing to the next, from one week to the next from one birthday to the next, from one Christmas to the next and fail to stop, to remember and to give thanks. It is certainly not sentimental or maudlin to look back and to remember some of the people who have been instrumental in our lives. Our parents, our teachers, our friends, colleagues at work, neighbours, people with whom we have shared the special moments of our lives. Sometimes we will have photos to remind us of them, or presents that perhaps they have given us. Sometimes however we have to rely on our memories. And as we remember we can give thanks for their example, for the love they gave us or the things they taught us.

Paul, writing to the Philippians said: 'Dear Friends, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable or excellent or praiseworthy - think about such things'. Sometimes the news seems to be filled with stories that are depressing, violent or worrying. But each of us has a fund of memories which remind us of the goodness, grace and love which we have received from other people. Those people and the example they showed us give us hope and inspire us 'to lead lives worthy of the Lord'.

In that same letter to the Philippians Paul encourages his readers to 'live up to the example they have received' and to strain towards what lies ahead. He sees the Christian life as a race and speaks of 'pressing on towards the goal to win the prize for which God has called him'. That prize is Jesus himself. His eyes are on what lies ahead, on all that is to come and eventually to the joys of heaven.

So as we begin a New Year let us give thanks for all that we have learnt about the Lord in years gone by. Let us give thanks that God walks with us and watches over us now. And let us look forward to the future, secure and confident of Jesus' promise that he is with us always - in everything and through everything - until the very end of time itself.

May the Lord bless you and watch over you in all that 2018 may bring.

With my prayers and best wishes

Rt Rev Peter Hancock
Bishop of Bath and Wells