

Letters from the Churches

Few of us relish the change of seasons from summer flowers, autumn harvest and turning leaves to the dull tones of winter bareness. The days become shorter, the nights longer and for some there may be the added poignancy of seeing their life in the season of winter.

It was said of Sir Thomas More he was a 'man for all seasons', 'a man of marvellous mirth and pastimes and sometime of sad gravity'.

More, as a devout Roman Catholic, rose to be Lord Chancellor, but his failure to acknowledge Henry VIII as head of the church resulted in his imprisonment and execution.

Nearly 500 years after his death Sir Thomas's example lives on. His faith in Christ as the King of Kings allowed him to withstand all the various seasons of his life...

During Advent 2006 I displayed a car sticker, which read 'Jesus is the reason for the season' as a reminder that Christ is the centre of Christmas. New Year 2007 came and passed, spring and Lent, Easter and summer. One day I looked at that lingering sticker with fresh insight and knew why I had not removed it. 'Jesus is the reason for THE season', whichever season we are in.

As the Bible tells us, 'Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever'. With Jesus there is hope and strength for each season culminating in that most perfect season of all, eternity. Why not make Jesus your 'man for all seasons' today?

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It's funny how the past can so often catch up with us, sometimes in a nice way, but sometimes in not such a nice way. We all of us remember something unpleasant from the past. Perhaps something we said or did that keeps pricking our conscience. Perhaps we still harbour resentment against someone who did something to us. Perhaps there's something we should have done but haven't. Maybe we did something that we hope will never be found out, but we carry the worry about our 'skeleton in the cupboard' around as a burden through life.

Now, for those with faith, there is something that can be done about this. In the most famous prayer of all, Jesus taught us to pray: "Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us." We can ask God's forgiveness, but only when we have forgiven those who have wronged us. Then, and only then, will we be able to receive forgiveness from God Himself. If we can forgive people who have hurt us, then God will forgive us for the things that hurt Him.

Now the things that hurt God are all the things we do which fall short of His standards. Jesus summed those standards up in the two key commandments: to love God and to love our neighbours as ourselves. Sadly, we're not too strong on the old Biblical Commandments these days. How many of us could name all ten? Some might say they are defunct but looked at carefully they enshrine the basic concepts that should give our lives meaning: relationship with God and relationship with each other.

There's a story that a Jewish Rabbi remarked jokingly to a Christian minister when they were discussing the Bible "You took the Ten Commandments from us". "Certainly," came the reply, "but you can't accuse us of keeping them!"

Well, how about giving them a try, starting today? It's a start toward making the World a better place.

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