

Why should it be any different?

You know one definition of madness: 'to do the same thing, time and again, and expect a different outcome'. We know that we are each fallible, weak-willed (to a certain extent) and unable to live up to our highest aspirations. So why do we make New Year resolutions, expecting the outcome to be different this time around? We do so, partly because we are people of hope. We hope in God's redeeming goodness. We also hope that God's grace can bring changes to our lives. We are not bound, in a determined way, to repeat the mistakes and foibles of yesterday. However slow it may be to work, God's grace can gradually transform us. We hope – we pray – we want to be different – and, with God's grace, we are confident that next year does not have to be identical to last year. 1 Peter 3.15: "Always be ready to make your defence to anyone who demands from you an account of the hope that is in you". That wonderful verse does not expect that I will be perfect in the future; it does expect that I am the sort of person who is prepared to look for shoots of new growth, signs of a new start, confident that God's grace is alive and active amongst us.

The Creed says: 'I believe in the forgiveness of sins.' It is too easy only to hear that as believing that, when sins have been committed, forgiveness can put things right. But for Jews in Jesus's day, "Forgiveness of Sins" was a description of something much larger. The cultural expectation was that, one day, God would re-create, taking away the blocks that thwart our noblest dreams, and making space for us to start again. The best description of this is found in Revelation 21: "I saw a new heaven and a new earth". That is the scale and scope of God's forgiving action: the whole of creation is to be re-made. This is on so much bigger a scale than personal misdemeanours.

I think I recognise this in my own life. I have a certain amount of will-power, combined with determination and good ideals But so often they don't quite achieve what I hope for. God's recreation (also known as "the forgiveness of sins") indicates that these same ingredients can be rearranged – re-aligned one day – so that they work together for good, rather than frustrating themselves. That is what I long for: that the goodness in you and me, and countless others, can be brought into coherent shape, working smoothly together, to move us in the direction of beauty, hope, renewal and mutual flourishing. Perhaps the best example at the moment can be seen as we consider the goodwill surrounding Climate Change. There are a lot of people hoping and working for a better world; there is a certain amount of political goodwill But at the moment, it is not achieving what it could. My hope is that one day, all this goodness will be harnessed and pulling in the same direction. That is when we will see "a new heaven and a new earth".

So, 'the forgiveness of sins' is not about being a different person. I will be the same person, but my efforts, my intentions and my dreams will be aligned, empowered, released to making the world a better place.

Why do I think that 2023 will be different? Not because of our well-intentioned but meagre efforts – but because I have confidence that, as we place ourselves God's disposal, blocks will be eroded and talents will be brought into harmony. Then we will glimpse a new heaven and a new earth.

Rev Canon Robert Cotton

Resources

3Generate is the annual gathering for young people from across the Methodist Church. What an incredible weekend we had at 3Generate 2022! Over the weekend we welcomed 1191 children and young people, 456 leaders and 252 team at the NEC in Birmingham. Watch the after movie below to see what happened...This video acts an encouragement and a window onto our larger church family.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NAtfE_meYo&t=14s

3Generate in 2023 will be at NEC in Birmingham 6-8 October - pop the dates in your diary now.

'Scams Awareness & Saving Safely this Winter' Free webinar

Buckinghamshire & Surrey Trading Standards hope you'll join their free webinar for 'Scams Awareness & Saving Safely this Winter'. This will be hosted on the 11 January at 6.30pm to 7.30pm, with guest speaker from Surrey Fire and Rescue Service. For further information and/or to book your place, [visit our Eventbrite page.](#)