

## Vicar's Letter

### A matter of life and death.

Alongside the bumper attendances in our Churches at Christmas (a rise echoed in churches and cathedrals around the country), I have been very aware of the large number of parishioners or their loved ones who have been critically ill recently. There have also been an unusually high number of bereavements over recent weeks. This is something we all feel, when it is a member of the congregation we have been aware of or praying for, or a relative of someone at church – we feel close to others as we are linked in prayer and concern and empathy. I have been especially touched by the number of kind thoughts and messages I have received since my father's death at the end of December.

An illness or bereavement around or soon after Christmas may seem more difficult than at other times – but I wonder if this is so. The reassurance of Christmas is that heaven and earth have been brought close; that in the birth of Jesus we have the promise that God is with us in this life and in the life beyond: Jesus embraces our humanity to offer us all a share in his divinity. Some Christmas carols seem to be especially moving in the way they link birth and death, human life and eternal life. The promises of Christ are not about an easy time in this life, but about everything working out for

the best in the long run. The reality of our experience here is not glossed over: we will face pain and suffering



as Jesus did (even though modern philosophies of self-improvement and material fulfilment try to persuade us we will not) but our life here is overshadowed by the greater reality of the eternal life that lies ahead for us all. This greater perspective on things helps, for if we set too much store on this life for ourselves we will inevitably be disappointed. Something much more wonderful awaits us.

This doesn't mean that what we do and how we care for others in this life doesn't matter. I believe that we take with us the seeds of who we are and what we have done, and from these we grow into the life of heaven. Our future will be quite clearly shaped by what we make of the chances we have here and now. But this makes faith and belief in the future, in God's future, a crucial part of our present perspective. It affects everything we do and everything we experience. To live by the light of faith is the key, for this perspective on reality (as C.S. Lewis said of Christianity) "if false, is of no importance, and if true, of infinite importance. The only thing it cannot be is moderately important."

In Lent, therefore, we remember that we are but dust, and it is a consoling thought. Yet Easter beckons when our mortal nature will have put on immortality...

*With my prayers*  
J

