

OUR EYES FIXED ON JESUS

(Hebrews 12.1-3 and Luke 4.14-21)

Made any New Year resolutions this year? Or did you make a resolution not to make any more resolutions last year? If we were to make a New Year resolution, then we couldn't do better than what the letter to the Hebrews urges. That is to fix our eyes on Jesus.

The letter to the Hebrews was written to Jewish Christians, who were undergoing a time of persecution by the Roman authorities. They were being tempted to give up their Christian faith, and go back to Judaism, because that way they would escape the persecution.

So the letter writer writes this to them: Run with perseverance. Fix your eyes on Jesus. Consider Him. Do not grow weary and lose heart.

And we may not be being persecuted like the recipients of the letters to the Hebrews' but we can easily be tempted to give up.

We might give up because of weariness, as the writer to the Hebrews says. Certainly before Christmas there was a spirit of weariness about St Mary's, as church life seemed to have become busier than ever. But the Christian life is not like a sprint, it's more like a marathon. We need to pace ourselves, and look to Jesus for a season of rest if necessary.

We might give up because we have lost heart, because of some disappointment in our lives. It could be the illness or death of a loved one, or problems with relationships. Under that sort of pressure, it can be very hard to look to Jesus, and some people can even blame God for what has happened. They can feel cut off from the loving God we can see in Jesus, and just give up on following Him.

Or we might get distracted by the rampant materialism and hedonism of our society. We might start to indulge ourselves because the adverts seductively tell

us that “we’re worth it”. It’s easy to underestimate the power of our consumer society.

Or we might give up because we don’t like the way the church is going. We might think it’s changing too fast or not changing fast enough. It never concerns me if people stop coming to church because of that, as long as they find a church that suits them better. But many people don’t find somewhere better, they just stop coming altogether.

The problem is that no church is perfect. Groucho Marx once quipped that he wouldn’t join a club that would have him as a member. Similarly, if I found the perfect church, I would certainly spoil it if I joined! I’ve been reading the book about church history that John Lambert recommended in “In Touch”, and I’ve been struck by how, time after time, church leaders did appalling things that they could never have done if their eyes were fixed on Jesus.

The first time I heard Alan Farish preach he said something that I have always remembered. He said “the main thing is to make the main thing the main thing.” And the main thing in the Christian life is following Jesus. Fixing our eyes on Jesus. The writer to the Hebrews also says “sin so easily entangles”, and that’s what can happen if our eyes are fixed somewhere else.

It’s not as if we don’t have a wonderful picture of Jesus in the Bible on which to fix our eyes. What Jesus said and what he did. Loving the unloved and the unlovely. Bringing good news for the poor, freeing prisoners, healing the blind, stinging the oppressed free. Rejected by his own people. Willingly dying a horrible and shameful death so that we might have forgiveness of our sins and have eternal life. And we know much more about Jesus than about any person living 2,000 years ago; far more than about Julius Caesar or Nero.

And so as we fix our eyes on Jesus, we can employ the great test whenever we are perplexed or facing discouragement. The test of “what would Jesus do” if He were faced with what we are faced with. WWJD as youngsters had on their wristbands a few years ago.

So as we start a new year, let's run with perseverance. Let's not grow weary and lose heart. Let's consider Jesus. And in particular let's make the main thing the main thing by fixing our eyes on Jesus, on what he said and what he did for each of us.