

## January 2019

Dear Friends

As I write this, I can hardly believe that another year has almost ended, Christmas is only three weeks away and that I, once again, need to think about what will be the most appropriate things to say in my letter for January 2019.

I always feel that the beginning of a new year enables us to look back over the year that has just ended; to evaluate what we have experienced during that year; to take stock, as it were; and to make a new start. The idea of evaluating the year that has passed and making a new start at the beginning of the new year which was stretching out before us was what originally brought about the thought of making New Year resolutions. The evaluation of the old enabled people to look at what they had 'done wrong' or, perhaps, not done well enough, and try to work out how they could do better in the year to come.

This is all very well when the power to improve things rests firmly in our hands. We can, at least, try to improve our lot, so to speak, even if we end up by failing yet again. What can we do, however, when the power does not rest with us but with a power or a force that is greater than ours – such as the Government or a foreign power?

As I ponder on our world as I write this, or, indeed, listen to the perceptions and views of others as they comment on the situations we face – not only in Britain or in Europe, but in other parts of the world – it is sometimes hard to look positively on what the future holds for us at the start of a new year. As we read or watch the News programmes and hear about shootings and violent demonstrations in which many innocent people are killed or seriously wounded, natural disasters such as earthquakes floods and wildfires, or the problems of homelessness and poverty in Britain, and, of course, the uncertainty of our future as a nation after Brexit (or no Brexit), it is hard to feel positive and, indeed, we are more likely to feel helpless as we contemplate what, if anything, we can do to make any of these situations better.

Of course there are the local food banks to which many contribute throughout the year and there are opportunities to support efforts that are made in our larger towns throughout the winter, such as the Ipswich Night Shelter aimed at the homeless in our county. We can "do our bit" as it were, to save fuel in our own homes by having solar panels or cavity wall insulation installed. We can look after our elderly relatives, and keep an eye on friends and neighbours, but we can do little to prevent national or natural disasters from occurring.

So is our world such a depressing and hopeless place as we could be led to believe? Of course not! There is a saying '*While there's life there's hope*', and we who are part of the Christian community believe that there is hope in any situation we face. Where is God in all of this? Is a question that is frequently asked. The answer is : He is in the middle of it. Where people are losing their lives or their loved ones; where homes or businesses are being flooded or people are starving or losing jobs, God is there suffering with them and as we face a New Year in which many of the issues we face appear to be worsening rather than improving we can do no better than to take the advice which King George VI gave in one of his Christmas broadcasts when life was also looking quite bleak:

*"And I said to the man who stood at the gate of the year: 'Give me light that I may tread safely into the unknown'. And he replied: 'Go out into the darkness and put your hand into the hand of God. That shall be to you better than a light and safer than a known way.'"*

M. Louise Haskins *The Desert* 1908

May I wish you all a Happy New Year and may we work and pray together to make our world a better place.

With love in Christ

*Sheila*

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