

Vicars letter Jan/Feb 2012

You're not singing any more.....

It's a phrase often chanted at footy games to wind up the opposition supporters. One group of fans sing it to the other lot- especially when the opposition team is not playing well or is losing.

You're not singing any more.....

But it's a phrase that can be used to describe other times of our lives. Especially post Christmas! You're not singing any more- and you might think – “well Thank God”! Because we can get a bit sick of the constant background noise of Christmas tunes played over and over again (and for some reason I even bought *Now that's what I call Christmas*). I frequently feel sorry for shop workers who day in day out, hour after hour have to listen to Christmas tunes played on a seemingly endless loop. They seem to me too often have that glazed look in the eyes – the result of being exposed to prolonged Christmas song 'torture'!!

You're not singing any more.....

But maybe the fact that I am mentioning Christmas in a post Christmas letter even makes you feel uncomfortable. At some level you might catch yourself thinking - 'but I am done with Christmas. I've packed it up and put it away, I've got my house back again - please don't remind me of Christmas and especially don't remind me of these wretched songs

You're not singing any more.....Thank God!

There is something about Christmas (or maybe the way we celebrate it) that turns the season of good will and peace to all in to a season of weariness and tiredness. I know that as vicar who finds himself having to conduct service after service in a short space of time I can sometimes feel weary of church. But there are other sources of weariness. We start a new year with all sorts of resolutions (well some of us) but it don't take too long before we've broken them or messed up or stuffed up!

You're not singing any more.....well no wonder we're tired

Or if it's not us it's the world out there. Christmas Day is celebrated and all is well – but within 24 hours a teenager lies dying in a London- stabbed in the sales. The New Year starts- and it starts with a lot of hope and good intentions but in only a matter of hours we are hearing of more conflict, or of tragedies, of murder both at home and abroad and we get weary.

You're not singing any more.....well what's there to sing about?

So I was immensely grateful for the hymn that I was able to sing as I started the New Year. I went to church – and met a surprisingly large number of others also there. We thought we would only get a few at a service that started at 10.15 on New Year's Day – but blow me we had over 60 people there. And what a gorgeous time we had- together and with God.

As 2012 started on a Sunday I am going to run with the idea that it started on a good day- the Lord's Day (as it has been seen by many throughout Christian history). And on that Lord's Day, at the start of a New Year we heard the Lord's truth as we sang the hymn:

It came upon a midnight clear- that glorious song of old.

In other words – You're not singing any more..... But -
You're still singing- and all the more.

The hymn is about the song the angels sang and sang and sang (and still sing) as they announced the gift of Jesus, God taking on human existence and human experience (and human suffering) in order to bring hope and help. The hymn continues with this:

And yet with woes of sin and strife
The world has suffered long
Beneath the angel-strain have rolled (angel-strain = the angel song)
Two thousand years of wrong
And man, at war with man, hears not
The love song which they bring:
O hush the noise, ye men of strife
And hear the angels sing
And ye, beneath life's crushing load,
Whose forms are bending low,
Who toil along the climbing way
With painful steps and slow,
Look now! For glad and golden hours
Come swiftly on the wing.
O rest beside the weary road,
And hear the angels sing!

Now here is a song to sing and sing- or at the very least here is a song to stop and listen to. Yes I am weary; yes I am sick of reading and hearing of tragedy and disaster, and conflict, and greed, and cruelty. And yes I am weary of the spiritual laziness and spiritual indifference that surrounds and affects all of us.....

BUT

The angels can't stop singing of a God who is greater, and stronger and better than all these things. The angels can't stop singing of a God who is still at work- diving into mess, digging deep to pull people out. The angels can't stop singing of a God who constantly refreshes and renews. So in my weariness I stopped – and rested- along my weary road- and listened to the angels sing. And maybe that will help me to sing again.....

How about you?