

Villages - February 2025

A couple of months ago one of our cold taps stopped working. I knew what it was: the valve was gone. It had been playing up for a few months before that – needing multiple attempts to open and close before eventually water started coming out. But in the end the trickle dried up to nothing, and no matter what we did, no water came out.

I did try to fix it myself, but couldn't manage to get the tap apart to replace the valve. I got so frustrated by it that I even contemplated replacing the tap completely, and would have done so except Christmas was a bit too busy for me to sort it out.

In the end, as the house belongs to the diocese of Salisbury, they sent someone to look at a few other jobs that needed doing, and he was happy to fix the tap at the same time. But instead of replacing the valve as I was expecting, he stripped it down, cleaned it, replaced a washer, did a little bit of filing, and put it back in. I was impressed: I love it when you can repair something and don't have to throw it away. However, it doesn't work as well as it did, and unfortunately I am aware that it will need another repair at some point.

But the three options – a repair job, a replacement valve, or a completely new tap – seem to me a good analogy for the message of Christianity.

The Bible teaches that while God loves every single human he has made, we are all imperfect. We all do things wrong from time to time - perhaps hurting someone else in selfishness, perhaps harming ourselves through fear or anger.

So we work on ourselves, don't we? Most of us at least try to be better, to do better. That is where most religions and non-religious creeds and lifestyles come from - a desire to improve ourselves and our communities. This is a bit like the plumber who repaired my tap. We knock off a bit here, adjust a bit there, until we work a bit better. It's not perfect, but it will do for now.

What Jesus offered his listeners, and still offers us today, is something slightly different. He offered to replace our valve. Building on the words of one of the Jewish

prophets, Ezekiel, writing a few hundred years earlier, he offered to replace our cold, dead hearts with living, breathing ones. Not literally, of course, but emotionally, relationally, spiritually. He offers to give us a better ability to love God and each other. That was the good news that drew his first followers to him and has attracted hundreds of millions ever since.

I am not claiming that Christians are better than others – that is clearly not the case. What I am suggesting is that God offers each of us the possibility of being better than we are, of living up to that character that we would love to have, of being that bit more patient or controlling our impulses a little better. And I for one know that I need that help every single day.

But there is one more promise that is absolutely central to Christianity: the resurrection to a completely new me. Jesus offers all those who trust him not only to help them in the here and now, but also that one day he will replace these flawed versions of ourselves with the perfect version that were always intended; still recognisably us, but working properly. Like a new tap, but one which will never need replacing or repairing.

May your 2025 be full of love, joy and hope.