

Bishop of Lancaster – New Year Message 2019

In the Duff family, we have a tradition of a going for a walk on New Year's Day.

The plus side is, it's a great opportunity to get some fresh air and work off some weight from Christmas. The downside is that you don't have a choice over the weather.

We've had the very wet, the very windy and the very snowy over the years.

There was the walk we did one year up Moel y Gest in North Wales ... it was crisp and sunny when we started, but on the way back the cloud came down and a snow storm blew in.

I remember sheltering under a bush with my son Harry, who was 2 at the time, while my husband Jeremy went to get the car - which promptly broke down in the snow! Only my boys were excited about being towed home by the AA!

We like to think we don't need to pay attention to the weather. We can press on regardless...

But when there's a fair wind, why not make the most of it?

I was with a fellow bishop the other day who said he thinks there's a change in the wind direction over our nation. He's not the first to notice this. I completely agree.

I sense there's a fresh openness to the good news of Jesus that has been building over recent years.

My experience is that people are intrigued by faith.

Look at the recent programming on the BBC: Rev – about a vicar in inner city London; Broken, an award-winning drama about a Catholic priest in Liverpool and my favourite - Bluestone 42 - about an attractive young female chaplain serving with the army in Helman province.

And that's not even touching on Disney, who make millions of pounds at the box office by selling films that are basically stealing plots from the gospel: Frozen, Beauty and the Beast.

The BBC did a recent survey about miracles. They were very surprised to find that 3 out of 5 people believe in miracles; and it turns out the younger you are, the more likely you are to believe.

I'm from Bolton and you may recall the miracle at Bolton Wanderers back in 2012.

Wanderers player, Fabrice Muamba, collapsed on the pitch from a heart attack. Even Adrian Chiles on BBC Sport commented: "You could hear the whole stadium praying."

Then 78 minutes after his heart stopped, he literally came back to life. This should not have happened!

In the Bible, Jesus said this about his Spirit: "The wind blows wherever it wills. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit". (John 3.8)

Bede (who was an 8th century historian of the Northern church) put it like this: "Unfurl the sails, and let God steer us where he wills."

The wind across our nation is changing. We are a nation that is intrigued by faith; a majority of us believe in miracles; we are hungry for hope, we have a longing for heaven.

So, at the start of this New Year, don't hide away indoors.

Get out into His wind. Let's unfurl our sails and let God steer us where He wills. And may the wind of His Spirit guide you to people and places you never imagined.