

The Bishop of Peterborough writes

Shocks and Surprises in 2017?

2016 was a year of surprises. You might feel that we could all do with a bit more stability in this New Year. However, I doubt that we can bank on it. Whether you are into politics, sport, soaps and celebrities, or just family and friends, I'm pretty sure you can expect a surprise or two. But I'm not going to make any predictions.



One of the interesting things about surprises is how we react to them. It is worth thinking about that. What sort of reactions do you have to a shock election result, or an unexpected sports champion, or an ex-politician being lauded for dancing badly in a yellow suit? Or, much more seriously, how do you react to the news of the serious illness of a loved one, or even yourself? Or the death of someone who has been a hero of yours, or of a family member?

The immediate reaction isn't the most important thing. Some of us are more volatile than others, or more used to showing our feelings. Others seem to take everything calmly, maybe too calmly. But what counts is how these shocks and surprises affect us long term. You may have met someone who says that a tragic event caused them to lose their faith in God. You may be someone who has never been able to deal with a deep disappointment or a death in the family.

Jesus seems to rebuke his disciples for panicking in the face of a storm, even a life-threatening one. He seems to imply that his presence ought to give us a deep peace, a strength to deal with what life throws at us. But it isn't that easy. He still wept at the grave of his friend Lazarus, and he still showed anger at those who used the Temple to make a profit from the poor. He isn't modelling or teaching a false calmness, an emotional deficit.

The big question is: Can we trust him, whatever life throws at us? The famous saying of Job in the King James Version of the Old Testament, "*Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him*" (Job 13:15) may be a bad translation, but it still sets us the challenge. And the testimony of the whole Bible, and of so many Christian people in history and today, is absolutely clear.

Come what may, he can be trusted. *Great is thy faithfulness.*

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