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Dear friends,

After a recent funeral a man came up to me looking very thoughtful. Though not a churchgoer, he was moved by the sincerity of the service and the words that had been said about the friend he had known for many years. He summed up his concerns by saying, "I am just wondering what anyone is going to find to say about me." I assured him that I was sure there would be many positive comments that could be made, even though I did not know him. Having taken hundreds of funerals, there are always positive memories that can be found. But this man was not completely convinced. Attending his friend's service had made him stop and think about just who he was, how others saw him, and what really mattered to him.

Such reflections are no bad thing. I was recently asked, "What are your special areas of concern in everyday life?" This is not the kind of question any of us tend to be asked casually, yet here I was being expected to respond. It is a very good question, and one worth considering. If it were to be asked of you, how would you answer? It is not a question searching for an answer about the small details of everyday life. It is a question looking to probe underlying values and concerns. How you are going to pay the bills is an everyday concern and one that might be so over-powering that you cannot see beyond it. How the children are doing at school can be a similar concern. But this question looks to go beyond personal circumstances to consider the kind of world in which we live.

We all know many people who spend a great deal of time complaining about the world. The success of the television programmes 'Grumpy Old Men' and 'Grumpy Old Women' are that for many people it is very easy to identify with the complaints that are made about the way the world has apparently changed for the worse over the decades of life. Yet complaints are, of themselves, futile. It might be psychologically healthy to let off steam about something, yet a

complaint is, of itself, a fairly meaningless activity. If we do not like what we see in the world, if something is a special area of concern, then what is required is prayer and action. Talk is all very good if it leads to action. If it does not, then it is just talk.

History is full of figures whose faith in Jesus lead to looking critically at the world around them and then to take action. These have affected big issues, but they have also made changes in much smaller areas of life. Our village is full of organisations that were the vision of someone and have made a difference to our community. The Boy's Club would not have existed without Miss Pemberton, daughter of the Rector of Ingatestone Church who was concerned about providing Christian and sporting activities for local boys. The Nursing Trust began because members of the church were concerned with how medical care could be given to the poor in our community before the National Health Service. Local Christians who saw a need locally, would have prayed for guidance and then taken action. We are very blessed that our local churches are full of people today who give of their time in many ways, like being School Governors.

The problem in 21st century Britain is that increasingly it is difficult to find people who are prepared to step outside their own individual concerns and become actively involved in their communities in order to make a difference. All organisations find it difficult to find volunteers who are willing to give of their time and talents. When I was at school in the 1970s there was much talk of a future where we would all have more leisure time, where our homes would be transformed by technology and we would be freed to make the world a better place. Instead we find ourselves so beguiled by technology that our time is eaten away. When many people are asked to do anything, the standard response is, "I am too busy". Why is that?

The New Year would be a good time for us all to consider what is really important in life and how we choose to use our time. Jesus said what was really important was to love God and to love your neighbour as yourself. The Christian faith teaches us it is never too late to repent of the past and to change.

Yours in Christ, *Patrick*

