

“Have you got a minute,” he said to me. “There is something I want to talk to you about.” He, was the Dad, of one of David, my eldest son’s best mates. “You know Charles is our youngest don’t you.” “Yeah” I said, “I do.” Charles Dad was a good 15 years older than me at the time. “Well years ago, when his brothers and sisters were younger, things weren’t always so peaceful here. The wife and I didn’t get on so well, I used to drink a bit and I had trouble with Charles eldest brother. We used to fight a lot, he used to take off and stay away for a while and then come back, but things never got any better. It all came to a head when Charles was very young, we had a big row and he left ... he’s never been back ... and I haven’t spoken to him since.”

Charles was David’s age, 14.

“I wish I could go back and do that again,” he said. I wish I got a second shot at being his Dad.”

You see I was there at Charles place to pick David up, for the umpteenth time that week and month, because we’d had a row at home and he’d taken off and gone to stay at Charles.

Charles Dad was gently, lovingly and graciously letting me know that this particular track led nowhere good.

“I wish I could go back and do that again, he said. “I wish I got a second shot at being his Dad.”

How many of us have longed for a second chance? The opportunity to put some things right. “I love you. I’m sorry. I shouldn’t have said that. I shouldn’t have done that.” The chance to stand aside, instead of stand up. If we had our time again, the things we might do differently.

Charles Dad didn’t realise it, but what he said to me hit the spot. It made me understand that the way things were going, it could all end in tears, and I didn’t want that to happen. I didn’t want to be, 14 years later ... not seeing or speaking to my son. So, I bailed out. I let go and stood aside, I let Janet take the lead and got out of the way. It took a bit of time, but all these years later it worked ... and that period is long forgotten.

But as you can tell I’ve never forgotten Charles’s, Dad’s words to me.

“I wish I could go back and do that again. I wish I got a second shot at being his Dad.”

How many of us have longed for a second chance?

In our reading from the Acts of the Apostles, this is what is happening here. Peter stands up to preach to the people in the Temple precincts in Jerusalem after the man born lame has been healed. He tells them the story of how the God of Abraham, Isaac and Moses, has glorified his servant Jesus... whom they had killed, but God had raised from the dead.

He says that the people acted in ignorance, as did their rulers, killed Jesus unknowingly, and that it was foretold that the Messiah should suffer. Then in spite of all that they had done ... Peter offers them ... that second chance. “Repent therefore, and turn to God so that your sins might be wiped out.”

Isn’t this what repentance is? The idea of a second chance? That repentance is simply the courage to give it another go, to turn around and head another way. To recognise that perhaps the direction things are taking, isn’t where we want to go ... finding the inspiration ... the good fortune of a word or a deed ... or a person who points that out?

“I wish I could go back and do that again. I wish I could get a second shot at being his Dad.”

Our reading from Acts offers that. Hopes for that. Promises that.

How many dead-end paths can we travel? How many broken walkways can we traverse? How many windy, hilly, single lane gravel roads can we cope with? How much driving in the wrong direction do we want to do?

How many of us have ever longed for a second chance?

I still feel for Charles’s Dad. I don’t know if he ever got to give it another shot with his son, but he certainly made it possible for me, not to learn that lesson the hard way.

The rulers and people of Jerusalem had travelled down a terrible path, now Peter was telling them that the path didn’t need to end in tears, but could instead, end in peace. He offers them a second chance ...

“Have you got a minute,” God says to us, “there’s something I want to talk to you about ...”

Thanks be to God.

Amen.