Who can possibly read the prologue to St John's Gospel without being profoundly moved by its beauty, its great hopefulness, but also its sadness? ‘He was in the world,’ says John, ‘and the world came into being through him. Yet the world did not know him. He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him.’

This was the terrible risk that God took by loving us. We could have been God's puppets, knowing and being known and clearly directed in all the right ways, as God pulled our strings, but it wouldn't have been love. For it to be love, it had to be free, and therefore it had to carry with it the possibility of mistakes and doubts and fears and failures, and even that the one through whom the world was made would come into the world and not be known by it.

Love can work in no other way, and therefore also, great hopefulness. Those of us who do receive him, who believe in his name, we are given power to become children of God, ourselves. This is the gift of the gospel; adopted family membership into the very household of God, with all the rights and privileges that go with being a first-born daughter or son, even, as St Paul puts it, ‘a co-heir with Christ’. Because it is love.

All the promises of the gospel and of life eternal are lavished upon us by the one who is God's Word made flesh, and who dwells close to the father's heart. This beautiful image of dwelling close to the father's heart runs right through St John's Gospel, even though it is hardly mentioned again specifically. For the invitation of the gospel, is that just as Jesus dwells close to God's heart, so we can dwell close to Jesus’s heart.

If you look at my bookshelves, apart from the Bible itself, you will find two books that have obviously been much read, much thumbed, and much loved. One of them is my great predecessor's book, William Temple's ‘Reading in St John's Gospel’. The other is Julian of Norwich’s ‘Revelations of Divine Love’, visions she received of the crucified Lord when she was thought to be close to death.

When she recovered, she wrote these showings down. One of the revelations is of the heart of Jesus, riven in two. She writes this: ‘With a glad countenance, our Lord looked at his side, rejoicing as he gazed, and as he looked I, with my limited understanding, was led by way of this same wound into his side. There he showed me a place, fair and delightful, large enough for all saved mankind to rest in peace and love. I was reminded of the most precious blood and water that he shed for love of us. And gazing still, he showed me his blessed heart, riven in two. In his sweet enjoyment, he helped me to understand, in part, at any rate, how the blessed Godhead was moving the poor soul to appreciate the eternal love of God that has neither beginning nor end. At the same time, our good Lord said most blessedly, “See how I have loved you.”

At the beginning of a new year, and with so much turmoil in the world and in the Church, I find great solace from these words. I offer them to you in whatever turmoils, confusions, and anxieties you may be facing. The heart of Jesus is open wide, open wide with love, and we can find our rest here.

See how he loves you. Amen.