

BBC Sporting Personality of the Year Award this year had so many contenders. On the world stage, the tennis-playing Williams sisters must rank highly as sporting heroes. After Serena's amazing performance at Wimbledon this year, she made a special point to thank her family and close friends who had supported her, especially when she was close to death in a hospital bed a year ago. She had stepped on some broken glass and a blood clot in her leg threatened her life. She explained that her true friends were the ones who stood by regularly, even daily, and who encouraged her in her darkest hours and helped her to think positively.

It is at times of highs and lows that we really know who our real friends are. They are the ones who are pleased for us on our achievements and on hearing our good news, but are also with us when we have disappointments or at the low times, which inevitably come. A friendly or comforting word, whether in person or by communication, can give a warm feeling or comfort. There is no jealousy or aloofness with good friends and they are quick to forgive our faults. In the Burt Bacharach song, Dionne Warwick movingly sings 'In good times and bad times, I'll be on your side forever. That's what friends are for.'

And Jesus was a great friend and still is. He cried when Lazarus died, he forgave Peter for denying him three times despite giving him the 'keys' to his kingdom. He saved the day at a friend's wedding at Cana and turned water into wine. Joseph Scriven's hymn sums it up: 'What a friend we have in Jesus, all our sins and griefs to bear...In his arms he'll take and shield you; you will find a solace there.'

At this Christmas time let us give the greatest present to all of our friends and be there for them always.

Ann Saunders

St Laurence Church