

Dear Friends,

How are you? How has your week been? I have been particularly busy, the new Methodist year has begun with all its meetings and demands, and it certainly feels as if we have hit the ground running. Living in the ongoing reality of a pandemic has not changed that, in many ways it has simply made it more complex as we consider how to do Circuit Meetings and continue to run Church Councils via Zoom, and overseeing the ongoing work of the Circuit and Churches in so many different ways. Questions about when and how we can meet are now being worked through and different ways of being and meeting are being offered in different places.

Alongside all of that we have had things to celebrate too, this week we have welcomed Reverend Lisa Quarmby to the Co-Superintendents team in a socially distanced welcome service that will be available for everyone to watch on Sunday morning at 10:30am, the link will be shared as soon as it becomes available.

As I said last week it is around this time of year that we would be thinking about making our Covenant prayer, reminding ourselves of the faithfulness of God and committing ourselves to a walk of continued discipleship, to following the way of Jesus day by day, moment by moment, and perhaps this is a good time to pause and ask ourselves how we might do that.

One of the readings from our Covenant Service is Romans 12: 1-2, this is from The Message Version:

***So here's what I want you to do, God helping you: Take your everyday, ordinary life—your sleeping, eating, going-to-work, and walking-around life—and place it before God as an offering. Embracing what God does for you is the best thing you can do for him. Don't become so well-adjusted to your culture that you fit into it without even thinking. Instead, fix your attention on God. You'll be changed from the inside out. Readily recognize what he wants from you, and quickly respond to it. Unlike the culture around you, always dragging you down to its level of immaturity, God brings the best out of you, develops well-formed maturity in you.***

Place your life before God, such a simple sounding instruction, and yet we all know how difficult, and yet how utterly freeing and life giving that can be. Difficult because we live full and busy lives that bring distractions, difficult because difficult things happen and pull us up short, and sometimes we need to regroup and refocus. Life giving because when we do manage to place our lives before God, day by day, moment by moment then we begin to live in time and in tune with the movement of the Holy Spirit, to move in the unforced rhythms of grace.

Place your life before God, your everyday life before God, that is what our Covenant prayer invites us to do, it invites us into a way of life that is centred upon the faithfulness and presence of God with us always, in joys and in sorrows, in good times and in hard times, in a time of pandemic and anxiety, in this time of change still God is faithful, still God is inviting us

to join in with the life and work of the kin-dom (yes I did write kin-dom that is not a spelling error, very happy to talk to you about why if you'd like to talk).

Place your life before God, so how do we do that, former President of Conference Reverend Dr Roger Walton offers us this pattern in "The Methodist Way of Life:

### Worship

- We will **pray** daily.
- We will **worship** with others regularly.
- We will **look and listen for God** in Scripture, and the world.

### Learning and Caring

- We will **care for ourselves** and **those around us**.
  - We will **learn more** about our faith.
  - We will **practise** hospitality and generosity.

### Service

- We will **help people** in our communities and beyond.
  - We will **care for creation** and all God's gifts.
    - We will **challenge** injustice.

### Evangelism

- We will **speak** of the **love of God**.
- We will **live** in a way that **draws others to Jesus**.
  - We will **share** our **faith** with others.

**May we be a blessing within and beyond God's Church, for the transformation of the world.**

He invites us to encourage one another in this way by joining together in small groups for mutual encouragement, to find 3 or 4 people that you can meet with and pray with regularly, and to ask one another how your walk of discipleship is going. There is nothing new in this of course, it is where Methodism began, not in buildings but in small groups meeting in homes, praying, and studying together, encouraging, and supporting one another. I wonder if this time of pandemic might be a time to revisit the life-giving possibilities of such a way of being. Are there two or three people that you could invite to join you in this way? Perhaps in doing so we begin to fulfil what is often one of the harder parts of our walk of discipleship and that is to care for ourselves, it is right there, under the

heading of learning and caring, it is there in the Scriptures, both Mark and Matthew record Jesus instruction to “love your neighbour as yourself”, just ponder that for a few moments.

So, as we move into this new year, we do so with the assurance that we are not alone, but we walk in company with God and with one another (hence kin-dom), we will do so through whatever life brings, remembering that when we do pray our Covenant Prayer we will say the words, ‘let me be employed by you, or laid aside by you; let me be full, let me be empty’. Discipleship is not an easy path, it is not exempt from struggle or pain, but it is not a solitary path, even when it might feel like it.

As you ponder the Methodist Way of Life, and the Covenant Prayer, what are your hopes, what are your questions, what are the joys they bring, and where are the struggles? How might you lay your life before God afresh, even in this moment, what would that require of you?

I pray that we would walk in the life-giving way of Christ, bringing our all in our day by day living as a prayer, offering ourselves to the one who desires to walk and work with us.

I pray that you would find those that you can walk a deeper path with, be utterly open and honest with, and that as you do so, so others will be drawn to a life of Christian discipleship because they will see your love for one another (John 13:34-35).

I leave you once again with a hymn, come just as you are, there is no other way:

*Just as I am, without one plea,  
But that Thy blood was shed for me,  
And that Thou bidst me come to Thee,  
O Lamb of God, I come, I come.*

*Just as I am, and waiting not  
To rid my soul of one dark blot,  
To Thee whose blood can cleanse each spot,  
O Lamb of God, I come, I come.*

*Just as I am, though tossed about  
With many a conflict, many a doubt,  
Fightings and fears within, without,  
O Lamb of God, I come, I come.*

*Just as I am, poor, wretched, blind;  
Sight, riches, healing of the mind,*

*Yea, all I need in Thee to find,  
O Lamb of God, I come, I come.*

*Just as I am, Thou wilt receive,  
Wilt welcome, pardon, cleanse, relieve;  
Because Thy promise I believe,  
O Lamb of God, I come, I come.*

*Just as I am, Thy love unknown  
Hath broken every barrier down;  
Now, to be Thine, yea, Thine alone,  
O Lamb of God, I come, I come.*

*Just as I am, of that free love  
The breadth, length, depth, and height to  
prove,  
Here for a season, then above,  
O Lamb of God, I come, I come!*

O lamb of God I come!

Once again, I assure you of my prayers, please be in touch if you would like to talk, if you get my answer phone and leave a message, I will get back to you.

May God bless and keep you always.

*Sally Coleman*

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The path to Stanage Edge