

10th July 2020

Dear Friends,

How are you this week? I am sitting in my kitchen-diner writing this, enjoying some rare sunshine, and hoping that the good forecast promised for next week really will be that! Last week, being a southern wimp, I put my heating on! Then I decided that it is 2020, so anything is possible!

I smile at myself for talking about the weather, how normal that is; it is nice to do something normal isn't it, and yet still nothing is normal. I know one or two of you have been out now that restaurants, coffee shops and pubs are open, and yet they don't look anything like they did, with spaced seating, limited numbers and more. I wonder if any of you have been brave enough to go for a haircut, and if so, did you enjoy it? Of course, we will all have different reactions, but still nothing is normal. Neil Harland, known to many of you of course, is our District Mission and Development Worker, and he has suggested a District swear jar for anyone talking about getting back to normal, and is instead asking us where we go from here.

Where do we go from here? That is a huge question - it brings with it a challenge to change and grow, but also brings a recognition that there can be no going back. As I think about that, I think about the language we use. I often talk about moving from my childhood home of Kuala Lumpur Malaysia, I was born and brought up in the Far East, it is what I knew, and yet when I talk of moving to England I talk of coming home, probably because that is the language my parents used! "Home" though was a strange place to me, the weather was markedly different - I was used to days of equal light and darkness, and certainly didn't expect the snow outside to be cold because the sun was shining so brightly! I also remember going to a Chinese restaurant with my parents and much to the delight of the owners ordering in Malay; thankfully they understood me! I can laugh at much of that now, but at the time it was very disorientating, and certainly wasn't coming home. I was somewhere totally different and I had to make huge adjustments, as did my parents, for the England they had left 15 years before, they and it had changed. That change is something I experienced again when I took my own children to live in Texas for 4 years.

Life is constantly changing of course, sometimes in small, and sometimes in big ways, and right now of course we cannot deny that we are facing a huge change, and that there can't really be any getting back to normal. So who/what holds us through this time of change?

We hold one another of course, in friendship, love and prayer, and then we are held by God. Listen to the words of Jesus as he sent out the disciples out away from what they knew into a different way of being:

"When Jesus came near, he spoke to them. He said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. So, wherever you go, make disciples of all nations: Baptise them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. ²Teach them to do everything I have commanded you."

"And remember that I am always with you until the end of time." (Matthew 28: 18-20)

He reminds the disciples that they were not going alone, for he would always be with them! This was again conformed as they experienced the gift of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, and that they knew that this was Jesus with them, in the power of the Spirit; his presence in them in a new and different way.

So, as we move through this time a few questions for you to ponder:

- What do you look forward to the most, post lockdown?
- How confident and safe do you feel about coming out of lockdown?
- What might make you feel safe?
- When church can open again, would you be willing to go to church? – Bearing in mind that services WILL look quite different.
- As we look to the coming weeks, what opportunities do we have to do something new?
- Where might God be inviting us to step out in faith, and hope, and love?
- How has our faith affected our experience of lockdown?
- How has lockdown affected our experience of faith?

I will add a few more questions next week but would be really interested to hear your answers and reflections, so please share them with me and with one another. We will be moving to a time of looking at our buildings, conducting risk assessments and considering safeguarding requirements. In this we need to move together carefully and prayerfully as we take decisions with our Church Councils and with the support and guidance of the Circuit.

I leave you with a hymn:

***From the breaking of the dawn to the setting
of the sun,
I will stand on every promise of Your Word.
Words of power, strong to save, that will never
pass away,
I will stand on every promise of Your Word.
For Your covenant is sure,
And on this I am secure—
I can stand on every promise of Your Word.***

***When I stumble and I sin, condemnation
pressing in,
I will stand on every promise of Your Word.
You are faithful to forgive that in freedom I
might live,
So I stand on every promise of Your Word.
Guilt to innocence restored,
You remember sins no more—
So I'll stand on every promise of Your Word.***

***When I'm faced with anguished choice, I will
listen for Your voice
And I'll stand on every promise of Your Word.
Through this dark and troubled land
You will guide me with Your hand
As I stand on every promise of Your Word.
And You've promised to complete
Every work begun in me—
So I'll stand on every promise of Your Word.***

***Hope that lifts me from despair, love that casts
out every fear,
As I stand on every promise of Your Word.
Not forsaken, not alone, for the Comforter has
come,
And I stand on every promise of Your Word.
Grace sufficient, grace for me,
Grace for all who will believe—
We will stand on every promise of Your Word.***

Please be assured of my continued prayer and care for you, and don't hesitate to be in touch if you need to, or if you simply want a chat.

Peace and blessings



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