

26th June 2020

Dear Friends,

You will of course be aware that this is the first letter that I have written for some time, and I would like to thank you for the care and concern that has been shown to me as I have been unwell and am starting to recover. This week for the first time in a month that I have come back to work part-time and am feeling my way forward. In that I would continue to value your prayers and would want to assure you of mine. I will need an operation soon which will require a little more recovery time, I have a follow up appointment to talk about that in a few weeks.

As I say, your care and concern for me has been much appreciated, and as I have caught up in different ways with our pastoral leaders and stewards I am aware that your care for one another has continued in a similar way, what a wonderful witness that is, as Jesus reminds us it is our love for one another that marks us out as his disciples!

It is not only our love for one another, those who are members and adherents of the church of course, but also our love for our neighbours and neighbourhoods, our wider communities, and the wider world. As Methodist Conference meets this week we are reminded that we are part of a National Body, and parts of that body such as All We Can, remind us that we are a part of the wider world, everything is connected!

We are reminded of that in this week's gospel reading which I offer to you now:

***We are intimately linked in this harvest work. Anyone who accepts what you do, accepts me, the One who sent you. Anyone who accepts what I do accepts my Father, who sent me. Accepting a messenger of God is as good as being God's messenger. Accepting someone's help is as good as giving someone help. This is a large work I have called you into, but do not be overwhelmed by it. It is best to start small. Give a cool cup of water to someone who is thirsty, for instance. The smallest act of giving or receiving makes you a true disciple. You won't lose out on a thing."* (Matthew 10: 40-42)**

Read that a couple of times if you can and ask yourself what you are struck by.

For me at this time I must say that it is the simple words: "It is best to start small", this week as we have heard the news that churches may open their doors from the 4th July, I must admit that my initial reaction was to feel completely overwhelmed by that. We will need to carry out risk assessments, have safety and safeguarding protocols in place, there is a lot of work to be done, and we will not be going back to anything familiar.

So, can we start small, being gentle with ourselves and one another, understanding that we will all feel differently, some will want to celebrate and others to mourn, some will want to rush back, others will be more cautious. We have been through a hard time, and that time is not yet over, I suspect that we will differently and variously need space to heal and recover, and recovery may not take us back to where we were but to a different place completely.

So it is okay to ask yourself how you are, and it is okay to take small steps, and as Leadership Teams and Stewards work with Ministers and the Circuit to ask what the future looks like, I ask too that you bear with us, allow us to take all of the steps necessary to make sure that we serve you and our community well and as safely as we possibly can. This is a large work, but God is with us just as God has been with us all the way through this time, we have the hope of the resurrection before us and the Spirit at work in and through us as we are held in the hands of our heavenly parent, our creator and sustainer.

We move forward with hope, one step, one day at a time, knowing that we are held in the plan that reminds us that **ALL** things are being made new. Holding onto that hope I offer you the words of this hymn, it is special to me as it was sung at my ordination, and I celebrate that anniversary this weekend. I remember standing on the stage at Southport and hearing the words spoken to me and others by Conference, those words were "They are worthy". Those words are for you too, as a member of the priesthood of all believers you are worthy even with faith as small as a mustard seed, you are worthy! You are worthy and you are sent by the Lord! So that hymn:

*Sent by the Lord am I;
My hands are ready now
To make the earth a place
In which the kingdom comes.
(Repeat)*

*The angels cannot change
A world of hurt and pain*

*Into a world of love,
Of justice and of peace.*

*The task is mine to do,
To set it really free.
O help me to obey;
Help me to do your will.*

We are called to be Co-workers with Christ, and with one another, to live lives of love and service, to allow ourselves to be loved by others and by God, and to know that we are a part of the divine design.

Maybe what we need at this time is Reinhold Niebuhr's Serenity prayer:

*God, give me grace to accept with serenity
the things that cannot be changed,
Courage to change the things
which should be changed,
and the Wisdom to distinguish
the one from the other.*

*Living one day at a time,
Enjoying one moment at a time,
Accepting hardship as a pathway to peace,
Taking, as Jesus did,
This sinful world as it is,
Not as I would have it,
Trusting that You will make all things right,
If I surrender to Your will,
So that I may be reasonably happy in this life,
And supremely happy with You forever in the next.*

Amen.

May God bless and keep you.

As always please be in touch if you want/ need to talk.



Reverend Sally Coleman (0114 2664637)