

27th March 2020

Dear Friends,

I want to let you know how much you have encouraged me this week, when I have phoned and been in touch with you by text or email you have been telling me how you are staying in touch with one another, checking in and making calls, and thank you to those of you who have called me.

I am going to continue to be in touch with our pastoral leaders and will try to call others of you throughout the week. My week now looks very different, but we have put in place a Co-Superintendents Meeting on a Monday morning, a District Superintendents Meeting on a Tuesday Morning and a Circuit Staff Meeting on a Wednesday morning. This is more than usual, but it is a way of the staff who are trying to support the churches staying in touch with one another, recognising that these are extraordinary times, and of course all of this helps me to support you.

In all of this I am reminded just how connected we are, and it reminded me of Jesus call for us to remain or abide in him, so I offer to you this Scripture:

The Vine and the Branches (John 15)

15 "I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. ² He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful. ³ You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. ⁴ Remain in me, as I also remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me.

⁵ "I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. ⁶ If you do not remain in me, you are like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. ⁷ If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. ⁸ This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.

⁹ "As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. ¹⁰ If you keep my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commands and remain in his love. ¹¹ I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete. ¹² My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. ¹³ Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends. ¹⁴ You are my friends if you do what I command. ¹⁵ I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you. ¹⁶ You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit—fruit that will last—and so that whatever you ask in my name the Father will give you. ¹⁷ This is my command: Love each other.

Love one another, well you are certainly doing that, and more, and it is heartening to hear, but I also want to acknowledge the worry and the anxiety I have heard, and of course these are anxious times. This Sunday will be the fifth Sunday in Lent, the themes of it are resurrection and new life, with the readings from Ezekiel 37: 1-14, and Luke 11: 1-45, the stories of the dry bones being called back to life, and the raising of Lazarus, I reflect that in both of these stories there was a waiting time before new life was brought about,

in the case of Lazarus the disciples and the family of Lazarus were confused by Jesus not swiftly going to Lazarus, with the result that he died! It might be that we are experiencing questions like theirs in these times, initially the disciples thought that there was nothing to be concerned about, and Mary and Martha were convinced their friend would come.

I wonder what questions arise in your mind as you ponder those stories in these days, what would you like to ask God/ Jesus?

When we think of loss, and I am sure we have all been touched by it in some way, how does the image of Jesus weeping for his friend help you? Or maybe it doesn't, maybe you are cross with him! Why not phone someone this week to talk through that together.

Lastly even in these strange times the Scripture reminds us that ultimately we will find ourselves caught up in the resurrection, the love of Christ in God for the world, and the power of the creative and recreative Spirit is stirring and groaning the aching world into a new way of being, and we hold out the hope that there will be a day when all things , ALL THINGS, are made new, there will be no more sickness, or dying or pain! That is our hope, and while the journey took Jesus to the cross the cross was not the ultimate destiny, nor was the tomb, and Easter will still happen even if it happens very differently.

So I offer you a song to ponder (or sing if you want to):

1. I heard the voice of Jesus say,
"Come unto Me and rest;
Lay down, thou weary one, lay down
Thy head upon My breast."
I came to Jesus as I was,
Weary and worn and sad;
I found in Him a resting place,
And He has made me glad.
2. I heard the voice of Jesus say,
"Behold, I freely give
The living water; thirsty one,
Stoop down, and drink, and live."
I came to Jesus, and I drank
Of that life-giving stream;
My thirst was quenched, my soul revived,
And now I live in Him.
3. I heard the voice of Jesus say,
"I am this dark world's Light;
Look unto Me, thy morn shall rise,
And all thy day be bright."
I looked to Jesus, and I found
In Him my Star, my Sun;
And in that light of life I'll walk,
Till trav'ling days are done.
4. I heard the voice of Jesus say,
"My Father's house above
Has many mansions; I've a place
Prepared for you in love."
I trust in Jesus—in that house,
According to His word,
Redeemed by grace, my soul shall live
Forever with the Lord.

Hold onto hope, the hope that you are known and loved, stay in touch with one another, and please be in touch with me if you would like to talk.

Peace and blessings



Reverend S.A. Coleman