

Friday 6th November 2020

Dear Western Area Friends in Christ,

Another lockdown is upon us and I wanted to share a brief message of greeting and encouragement round to the Circuits, churches and people in our part of the South East District.

I don't know how all of you are feeling at this time; probably there are a whole range of emotions and thoughts running through each one of us, at various times of every day – I know there are for me.

I find myself therefore drawn to the words of Psalms, as they cover a vast range of human experience and emotion; their words prove helpful, as they reassure me that I'm not the first person to ever feel bewildered by life and what it brings my way – we are not alone!

*'O Lord, you have searched me and known me.
You know when I sit down and when I rise up;
you discern my thoughts from far away.
You search out my path and my lying down,
and are acquainted with all my ways...
...You hem me in, behind and before,
and lay your hand upon me.'* (Psalm 139 vs1-3 & 5, NRSV)

At one time I might have thought of the idea of being 'hemmed in' by God rather daunting and restricting but now it paints for me the image of a loving parent or grandparent gently holding onto a fractious, anxious or upset little one; soothing them, calming them down and comforting them in their distress. So, I'm quite happy to be 'hemmed in' by God like that – telling me that's it's OK, God understands me and all that I think and feel; reminding me that, whatever my personal circumstances right now, I am not alone but held, listened to and loved.

Perhaps knowing that we are each known deeply, understood completely and loved beyond measure – is an idea of hope that can sustain us through these coming days and weeks until lockdown is lifted and life can return to whatever the 'new normal' was before we commenced this second period of increased separation and heightened infection control.

Please know that your circuits and churches are in my daily prayers according to the following pattern that I keep (if anyone wishes to join me, you're very welcome!):

- Sunday – Whole South East District
- Monday – Hants-Surrey Border Circuit
- Tuesday – Berkshire-Surrey Borders Circuit
- Wednesday – Thames Valley Circuit
- Thursday – Staines & Feltham Circuit
- Friday – Wey Valley Circuit
- Saturday – Dorking & Horsham Circuit

May God's blessing, presence and peace be with you all!

Sam

Rev Sam Funnell – Assistant District Chair (Western Area)

(A beautiful version of Bernadette Farrell's setting of Psalm 139 can be found at:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F4ScBPE9v_I if you have internet access.)