

Dear Friends,

My attention was caught this week by a business leader who was being interviewed on Radio 4. She was discussing the need for commerce and industry to plan how to *recover* from the lockdown. In her comments she used two words to which I could particularly relate as a minister of the Gospel. She said that business needs a *revival* plan. As I read of manufacturing giants like Jaguar Land Rover (JLR) shutting their massive car plants and laying idle 20,000 workers in that one company, the image of the valley of Dry bones (Ezekiel 37) comes to mind, and the analogy of giving new life to that which seems lifeless. That surely is the essence of revival. And as I thought about the concept of a Revival Plan, I wondered why we in the church have not already made a Revival Plan, even before the lockdown. Methodism was born in the Evangelical Revival, yet we seem to be embarrassed about planning for, or even speaking about, the Revival of the Church in Britain. The nub of it is that before spiritual revival can be social, it must be personal. In the eighteenth Century it began when John Wesley's heart was strangely warmed on 24<sup>th</sup> May 1738. His heart was warmed by the exposition of Scripture (Luther's Preface to Paul's letter to the Romans) and his own realisation of God's forgiveness.

The interviewed businesswoman on Radio 4 went on to speak of the *renewal* of British industry. Renewal carries the connotation of rehabilitation. The implication seems (to me) to be that of becoming fit for the original purpose through adopting new technology or methods. The church has been kickstarted into adopting new technology in order to maintain our presence and ministry. But something exciting has been happening. The local church has become less defined by geography and more defined by networks of relationships. This week I spoke to a Methodist worship leader from the West Midlands who has been worshipping in the church of a vicar in Wales whom she met years ago in Iona, Scotland, and she has been thoroughly enjoying the experience! I spoke to a former colleague, now a supernumerary minister residing in North Devon, who has been worshipping with his wife's home church in Leicester. This is an opportunity for *renewal* that up until now we have not really dreamed of, let alone grasped. Of course, churches like Godalming United Church, have been pioneers in broadcasting their service for some time.

I also read a newspaper article this week which spoke of the *restoration* of business following the trauma of lockdown. For me, restoration speaks of the

return of the exiles from Babylon to Jerusalem. There were defensive walls that had to be rebuilt. The Temple had to be renovated. There were enemies who had to be faced down, and vigorously defended against. Nehemiah's striking words from the ramparts he was repairing, come to mind. *"I am doing a great work, so that I cannot come down: why should the work cease, whilst I leave it, and come down to you?"* (Nehemiah 6:3). Nehemiah was driven by a powerful sense of purpose as he toiled tirelessly to restore the Holy City.

In Germany church service are now being permitted, with reasonable adjustments. There is newspaper speculation about the UK Government permitting church funerals to take place, though I have heard nothing official. But the need for recovery, revival, renewal and restoration in the church goes much deeper than returning to business as usual. There is a new normal to be discovered, developed and celebrated.

For many years business has been using our word, "mission", and some years ago we brought it back, belatedly, into church everyday vocabulary. Here are some more words, this week, that are being used in business circles: *recovery, revival, renewal and restoration*. They are all words worthy of our attention as we promote the mission and ministry of the church. I wonder, how might your church plan to enable the 4 Rs when lockdown is ended?

We have all sadly heard of dear people who have fallen victim to Covid 19, some of them church members. There are those in the circuit who have suffered personal loss, and our hearts go out to them. I can also include some good news. I had an email this week about an elderly gentleman whose health had caused great concern due to Covid 19, who is reported to be making a surprising recovery. God bless him, and all those who have been affected in any way by this terrible pandemic.

My thoughts and prayers are with you.

God bless you,

Keith

Rev Keith C. Beckingham, Superintendent Minister.