

Pastoral Letter

7th September 2021

Re-Centering for the
New Church Year

Rev Julia Monaghan

Happy Church New Year!

Friends, Happy Church New Year!

Are you still excited about being a Methodist? Are you looking forward with anticipation to this New Church Year?

Why, yes, sure you are! The Lord still has work for us to do as individuals; church communities; as a Circuit.

In Jewish midrash rabbinic teaching on the scriptures, it is said that Israel is at the centre of the world. At the centre of Israel is Jerusalem. At the centre of Jerusalem is the temple. At the centre of the temple is the holy place. At the centre of the holy place is the Ark of the Covenant, the presence and glory of God. Underneath the Ark is the foundation, the rock upon which all rests.

The imagery of this midrash takes us deeper and deeper to the centre of the centre of the centre and this is exactly what Jesus is doing in Matt 16: 13-20, when he gathers his disciples round and like a mission review, says in effect,

“We are half way through my mission, so experiencing all you have experienced- **Who do you say that I am?**” He’s not after head knowledge, but lived heart knowledge.



Read Matthew 16: 13-20

¹³ Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, “Who do people say that the Son of Man is?” ¹⁴ And they said, “Some say John the Baptist, but others Elijah, and still others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.” ¹⁵ He said to them, “But who do you say that I am?” ¹⁶ Simon Peter answered, “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.” ¹⁷ And Jesus answered him, “Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father in heaven.

¹⁸ And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it. ¹⁹ I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.” ²⁰ Then he sternly ordered the disciples not to tell anyone that he was the Messiah.

It's only Peter who gets that Christ is asking centred heart stuff and blurts out, ***“You are the Messiah, The Son of the Living Lord!”***

And Jesus responds with, ***“You are the Rock on which I will build my church.”***

On this occasion, Peter got the positive predicted grade, but the thing that we know about Peter is that life could get blown off course and by the time of the crucifixion, he is denying Jesus three times. But Peter's gift is that he never ceases to re – centre his life.

So as we begin a New Term, as we meet in our church councils and circuit meetings, we too could benefit from a mission review and re-centering.

Find a stick and draw some concentric circles in the sand/soil of the garden or on a piece of paper.

Starting from the outer ring, record your priorities – what gives your life meaning and purpose? By the time you get to the inner circle, ask, **who is Jesus for you today? Who is Jesus for you as a church community?**



Speak to Jesus about re-centering your life.

Do you find any resistance within you?

Of what are you most afraid as you enter a New Year?

What is your greatest need for the coming year?

Where is grace and mercy found?

Where is forgiveness and new life flourishing?

What is at the heart of your New Year's prayer?

These reflective questions could equally be asked at the beginning of a church meeting.

What is our greatest need as a community for the coming year?

Where is grace and new life flourishing in our church life/ Circuit?

You are invited to close with the following prayers.

Rev Julia (7th September 2021)

Holy, holy, holy God,
Holy and strong
Holy and immortal,
Have mercy on us and hear us as we make our confession

Holy, holy, holy God,
We pray as pilgrims in your temple,
Dancing in the mystery of your encircling love.
And finding everywhere is holy ground.
We thank you for Jesus, the centre of our being in whom
we live and move and find our purpose. We pray for the
Church; may the mystery of the Trinity be unfolded in
our life together, like a flower in the desert, that we may
be enfolded in your one love. Amen

Jesus, in this new year we pray:
To live deeply with purpose
To live wisely with humility
To live gratefully with generosity. Amen

Amen