

Dear Friends,

It is hard to believe how quickly time is passing during our lockdown. However, I thank God that lockdown for the church does not mean shutdown! Although our buildings are locked shut our hearts are still open to the grace of God and to compassion to one another and our neighbours. People I have spoken to have commented on the unreality and strangeness of the current situation. If Lent was a period when waiting with Christ in the wilderness, then this period is like being with the disciples, waiting for the appearances of the Risen Christ. Ahead, there may be more weeks of lockdown, more waiting, like the disciples who were locked in the Upper Room awaiting the coming of the Holy Spirit.

With all this waiting, sometimes patiently, sometimes feeling frustrations as we yearn for our normal life, the words of Isa 40:31 have become very meaningful to me:

“But they that wait on the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint.”

Let us pray for grace to receive this time as a gift from God, presenting us with unusual opportunities to reassess our usual routines and to be open to God guiding us into new ways of working.

I would like to thank everyone who has been innovative and have done so much to harness technology to enable us to keep our community together. In fact, some great advantages have emerged. For example, the Chit Chat conversation group that normally meets at St Mary's have had a Zoom meeting which former members from far off lands have attended via the internet although they have in fact returned home. So, our circuit is actively involved in overseas mission!

Other people have been simply checking their neighbour has opened their curtains or waived to them through the window. Pastoral visitors have been phoning their class members and sharing Christian love and compassion with each other in simple ways.

Zoom services have been developing at several churches. Preachers who would normally be planned have in some cases agreed to lead services by ZOOM and Rev Dave Faulkner has masterminded online video reflections with the help of circuit colleagues.

I am aware that there are church stewards who are kindly printing and distributing these pastoral emails, and they deserve our sincere thanks. For those who use the internet please do keep checking the Circuit, District and Methodist Church websites which are being regularly updated. Trustees will find additional resources of the Methodist Insurance and TMCP websites.

We need to thank Linda Weedon who has brought our attention to the current needs of Methodist Homes (MHA). With her encouragement members of the circuit have been generous in making donations to MHA. We realise that this is a time of care home staff shortages and increasing costs for protective equipment, and so all donations are well received by MHA. Our prayers are with Sam Monaghan and his MHA team as they carry a heavy burden of responsibility.

Stephen Cottrell quotes some words by Jean-Pierre Caussade (1675-1751) which give us something to think about: *“The present moment holds infinite riches beyond your wildest dreams, but you will only enjoy them to the extent of your faith and love. The more a soul loves, the more it longs, the more it hopes, the more it finds. The will of God is manifest in each moment, an immense ocean which only the heart fathoms insofar as it overflows with faith, trust and love”* (Christ in the Wilderness p. 94).

It is likely that many of us have recently learnt of the passing of someone we know or are very aware of the sadness that has struck all too many families recently. Here is a prayer you might like to use:

*God of infinite Compassion,
Look in love and pity on those who mourn.
Be their support and strength
That they may trust in you
And be delivered out of their distress;
Through Jesus Christ our Lord. AMEN. (MWB p. 486).*

Many God bless you

Keith