

Dear Friends,

I wonder what you are glad about *this* week. Perhaps after a morning of housework or other chores you have been able to sit in the sun in your garden, on your patio or balcony, or socially distanced in a public space. You sit down, perhaps thinking, "*How lovely, I have done all my chores for today*" ... and then you remember you need to phone someone, reply to an email, prepare for a Zoom meeting or attend to a corner of the garden where weeds keep reappearing. However, even brief moments of relaxing in the sun can make us glad.

This week I am glad about progress we are making in the circuit on several fronts:

Cranleigh have received final District permission to repair their hall roof when other factors allow.

Trinity Woking are still awaiting District consent for the work on their Narthex roof, and I am glad I have been able to give circuit consent for this.

I am glad to hear of church life continuing in many places with the help of technology. People are accessing services who have not been attending physical services in the circuit previously.

St Mary's service has been shared with the University of Surrey Students Union Facebook community, extending their ministry. (A full round up of online worship accompanies this email).

I am grateful to the Preachers and Worship Leaders who are adapting to ministry online.

I have not sung in a choir for some years, but I have recently enjoyed taking part in the (virtual) National Methodist Choir GB recording with the Methodist Youth Brass Band, MAYC alumni and other singers from across the world. The next song will be with Lou Fellingham, a well-known Christian recording artist who has made a new contemporary arrangement, called "*Everlasting Arms*", of the lovely gospel classic, "*He giveth more grace*".

I am glad to hear that a process has been underway in Godalming United Church that may result in the appointment of a minister in coming months. The Godalming leadership team are doing a great job with this, notwithstanding the lockdown.

I am glad that pastoral work, church governance, safeguarding and administration continue. Church Councils continue to do their work, albeit in new ways. The Circuit Stewards have met by Zoom to plan the management of

the 2020/21 stationing process and will be inviting members of the invitation committee to think about Inclusion and Unconscious Bias, as required by Conference.

I am also glad to have the weekly opportunity to meet online with the District Chair and superintendents from the SE District including Gibraltar and Malta and the Channel Isles District, which has not been possible previously. So much to thank God for and rejoice over even despite the lockdown! Having said all this, my prayers certainly do go out to all those sadly affected by the Covid virus, and it is right that we mourn with those who mourn.

This week we celebrate Ascension. It may seem odd that we celebrate Jesus leaving us and going to be with the Father. We are told that Jesus sat at the right hand of the Father (Romans 8:34). To sit implies a job well done. To sit at God's right hand implies prestige and authority. Jesus' great work of redemption was done on Calvary. The sacrifice was completed once and for all, atonement for our sins was accomplished. Nevertheless, we are told that Jesus is not idle in Heaven. He has gone to prepare a place for us (John 14:2). Moreover, he is constantly interceding, praying for us (Hebrews 7:25). Jesus' parting gift to the disciples was the promise to send the Holy Spirit upon the Church. Jesus is now able always to be in all places. Whilst Jesus was on earth, to help people in one place meant he had to depart from the people in another place. Now He is present within His people everywhere, and Jesus promised we would do "greater works" through His Spirit (John 14:12-14).

So, it is no wonder that Jesus' disciples celebrated His Ascension, despite their fear of persecution. When the Spirit came, they would receive courage and strength. They would receive the ability to "*rejoice in the Lord always*" (Phil 4:4). Walter Bruggemann comments, "*This fearful waiting community, which is still anxious and bewildered, has no power of its own. It possesses none and can generate none for itself... yet oddly power is given that enables this fragile little community to have energy, courage, imagination, and resources completely disproportionate to its size*". Surely that really is something to be glad about!

God bless you,

Keith

Rev Keith C. Beckingham, Superintendent Minister.