

Dear Friends,

I write again to extend my warmest wishes and prayers to you. I hope that the sending this letter Wednesday instead of Thursday will help those who are photocopying and posting out copies. Please remember that the District are also posting weekly worship at home resources on the South East Methodist District website, but these are not normally sent to superintendents until later in the week, so please check the District website (<https://methodistsoutheast.org/>) if you can.

I have been heartened at innovations around the Wey Valley Circuit. This week we have asked stewards to let us know what online worship is being provided. Details will accompany this email. If your own church doesn't have an online service, then why not ask for a link and password for another service? ZOOM services sadly do require the security of a password to stop undesirable interruptions by strangers. Please support your fellow Circuit churches in your daily prayers. Others of you will be using worship at home sheets or enjoying service broadcast on the BBC.

As I write, it is becoming clear that the lockdown is here to stay for some weeks more. We have asked church treasurers to let the Circuit know how local churches are being affected and the District is beginning to collate information too. However, pastoral care is continuing, albeit remotely by phone etc, and "public" worship is growing by ZOOM and in other ways. We remain deeply grateful to those who continue to support the church with their giving.

This is a good time for churches to begin to explore how to do things differently once public worship begins again. There are steps we should consider: such as having hand sanitizer permanently at church entrances; ways of taking the collection that minimise risk; sharing the peace without physical touch; making sure that biscuits served at church are not recycled back into the tin; wiping door handles more often; having seats further apart or using alternate rows etc. If you have good ideas please let me or Sue Howson know, so that we can share ideas around the Circuit.

As more and more people are bereaved or anxious about sick relatives, please let me know if an online support group would be appreciated. In 1 Peter 5:7 we read: "*Cast all your anxiety on Him, because He cares for you*". I am sure you will agree that these words have special significance for us at this point in time. How often do we carry all our cares as if we had no-one to truly understand or help us? It has been suggested that this does not reflect well on our faith. As we trust in God, we can turn to Him in humility and admit our anxiety and confess positively that we know God cares for us and will strengthen us by His grace. As we pray God may even put in our minds the name or face of a trusted church member who can support us in our anxiety. This is not a passive but an active faith. It has been said that to cast our care upon God, is part of what Peter begins saying earlier in verse 6, where we read "*Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God*" (ESV). The point here is that sometimes holding our anxieties to ourselves can be due to a false sense of pride. Recently, I read the comment, "*Don't submit to circumstances, submit to God*". Peter

encourages us, *“be strong in your faith. Remember that your Christian brothers and sisters all over the world are going through the same kind of suffering”* (verse 9 NLT).

The Christian life has never been the easy option. *“Our accuser, the devil, is on the prowl like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour”* says Peter (verse 8 CEB). John Wesley famously wrote, *“The gospel of Christ knows no religion but social religion; no holiness but social holiness”* (Preface to Hymns and Sacred Poems #5). Just as the creature that is separated from the herd more easily becomes prey for a hunting lion, so especially in these days of lockdown, it is so important for us to nurture bonds of fellowship by letters or phone calls, so that by the encouragement we give and receive we may remain strong in the face of anxiety. We can continue to pray for one another and assure each other of our mutual concern.

I recently came across some handwritten notes I scribbled many years ago, of an extract from *“On Being a Christian”* (p. 38) by the great theologian Hans Kung. He quotes from A. Toffler’s book *“Future Shock”*, written in 1970. This puts present circumstances into historical context: *“Man has existed for 50,000 years, which equals 800 lifetimes of 62 years. Of these 650 were spent in caves. Only during the last 70 has it been possible to communicate effectively from one generation to another – as writing made it possible to do. Only during the last 6 lifetimes did masses of men (sic) ever see a printed word. Only during the last 4 has it been possible to measure time with any precision. Only in the last 2 has anyone anywhere used an electric motor. And the overwhelming majority of all the material goods have been developed within the present 800th lifetime”*. These words published in 1970 are even more relevant today. As recently as 1970 there were no colour TVs, home computers, mobile phones, satellite TV, satnavs, emails or broadband internet! In 1970 there was no central heating, microwave, automatic washing machine, dishwasher, or tumble drier in my family home or many other peoples’ homes, yet we did not consider ourselves deprived! Daily life has changed remarkably in recent decades.

Friends let us be mindful of our blessings and thankful for our families and friends, especially our church friends and good neighbours. Let us realise that in the light of history and compared with many people in our own land and overseas we are truly blessed. When anxiety comes knocking at the door of our heart, let us consciously submit to God, put our trust in Him, knowing that He cares for us. *“After you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will Himself restore, support, strengthen and establish you”* 1 Peter 5:10 (NRSV).

God bless you,

Keith

Rev Keith C. Beckingham

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