



Dear friends,

For those of us bound up in education or in the life of the Methodist Church, we are in our annual period of transition. The summer months might no longer be the 'quiet time', where nothing really happens, but they are often the time for preparing for change. We bid staff farewell, and anticipate the stationing of new ministers at the beginning of September. We do maintenance and building checks between busy seasons of use. This period often offers us some time for reflection, and also for rest and restoration. Summer Church Councils and Circuit Meetings often make space for thinking about the wider mission and ministry of the Church, for open conversation beyond the pressing business of the day. Many of us anticipate holidays, or days out with friends and family in the (hopefully) better weather...

This year is different, and yet the same. The level of change which many of us are coming to terms with is huge. Change in the very ways we live our day to day life, change in terms of who we can see and how often...where we feel able to go and how we take care of our basic needs. This upheaval might dwarf the annual rhythm of change and renewal, but yet it is still there.

This week we will bid farewell to Revd Tim Boocock as he moves to the Darlington and Barnard Castle and Teesdale Circuits to take up the role of Superintendent Minister. In the same service we will pray with and for Deacon Merry Evans as he moves from his role in the City Centre. We also anticipate our farewell to Revd Godfrey Nicholson, which will take place a little later in the year. We look forward to welcoming Revd Pete Brazier and Deacon Guy Austin-Bride to the Circuit in September, and we pray for them, and for their families, as they move and settle in to new homes in the next month or so.

As we reflect on the 'when' and 'how' of the next steps for individual local churches, alongside the complex conversations about risk assessments and reopening buildings will come deeper reflection on what it means to be 'the Church' in our time and place. We will wonder together what we have learned in these months apart, about ourselves, about God and about our communities. We will be sad together, we will give thanks together, and we will begin to chart a way forward together...

We should also pause and wonder what 'a holiday' needs to look like for us, and maybe for those around us, depending on the character these last few months have had in our particular circumstances...

I was fascinated this week to receive some reflections on 'emerging from lockdown', written by someone I knew well a number of years ago. As always with his work, they were rich, thoughtful and compassionate, and rooted in biblical reflection. What interested me particularly, was the way in which I recognised themes which were present in his ministry when I first knew him, expanded and reworked to offer support and encouragement in these times.

I wonder if there are images of God, or stories of Jesus, which we know have been particularly important in our life of faith over a number of years...

Have they also sustained us in these past few months? Or have we found that we need to focus on different aspects of who God is in these changed times?

What is it about God which we find we need to 'hold fast' to in this present moment?

How might we each ensure that in these next few months we talk with one another about God and our life of faith, as well as about the practical complexities of our current way of life?

I pray we will each know God's blessing surrounding us as we wonder, plan and act.

Peace, Jo

I offer to you this week words from the service prepared by the Methodist Church for congregations to share when we are able to gather together for worship again. They are words of lament, but as so often in lament, they hold within them the seeds of hope, and I hope they will be helpful in these next few weeks...

We thought we knew how the world was meant to be.  
Day followed night, every week had a Sunday  
and that was the day for church.

**How can we sing the Lord's song in a strange land?**

We thought we knew how the world was meant to be.  
We made our plans, held our meetings,  
kept the roof on the church and the show on the road.

**How can we sing the Lord's song in a strange land?**

We thought we knew how the world was meant to be.  
We would see colleagues, friends and loved ones again,  
and we would embrace, laugh and share stories as we always have.

**How can we sing the Lord's song in a strange land?**

And now, we know something new.  
We know that the world is not ours to control,  
and that our plans are confounded by the smallest microbe.

**God is teaching us a new song, for a new land.**

And now, we know something new.  
We know that church is not committees, agendas and buildings,  
it is us, in homes, streets, hospitals throughout the world.

**God is teaching us a new song, for a new land.**

And now, we know something new.  
We only have today with those we love, today is the day  
to say, 'I love you', to mend an argument, to hold on tight.

**God is teaching us a new song, for a new land.**

As so often, there are also some practical 'notices' to share...

If you have kept your **regular giving** to your local church separate during this period of 'lockdown', expecting to make it as an offering as you return to gathered worship, please can we encourage you to contact your local Treasurer to see if it is possible to make that offering now. This will help with local church 'cash flow', in a time when income has, in most cases, been very low. Thank you.

**Church Council Secretaries, Property Stewards and Treasurers** – please look out this week for information about the processes we are following in this Circuit as we consider reopening buildings for worship. We give thanks for the small group working at Circuit level to offer support and oversight in this area.

**Musicians** – if you might be willing to consider playing during our regular Sunday evening online 'Zoom' services, please contact Jo or Cathy so that we can talk through the practicalities of this.

As you will be aware, **staff changes and annual leave** will affect who is available in the Circuit during August. We are grateful for your patience during this time.