



Dear friends,

This letter comes a week earlier than the usual pattern to enable us to share some thoughts as Advent begins...and I begin by unashamedly sharing the same questions that some of us reflected on during Zoom worship a week or so ago...

*What rhythms and routines help us to stay attentive to God?
Do we usually, or will we this year, do anything differently during Advent?
What helps thankfulness and hope to stay alive in our households?*

It's interesting that some of the 'coping strategies' which are needed to stay mentally and physically well in these strange times, are ways of being which are very familiar to many Christian communities: a rhythm of life (both through the day, and across the year), an emphasis on gratitude, and a determination to remain connected with others, to live in community in one way or another. I wonder whether you recognise those threads in your own life too? And whether they have become more important during this year...

For me as this Advent season begins it is the light which catches my eye and illuminates hope...

For years now we have had advent candles in our home, either the single kind which you burn a portion of each day, or candles to count each week of Advent and one for Christmas Day. The Light shines in the darkness...we prepare to recognise Jesus come among us once again...

This year I find that I need to participate in a bolder statement. The olive tree which struggled for life in our garden is now uprooted, dried and trimmed, finding a new life covered with lights. It shines brightly in our porch. In its light I notice the tiny blessing chalked high on the brickwork on the feast of Epiphany 2020, a prayer that Christ would bless this house...a prayer made before we could ever have imagined what this year might hold. And I recall the blessings which have crept up on us as we have lived these days... blessings in the midst of sadness, fear and uncertainty, blessings in the ordinary and extraordinary things of life. "Blessed are you who bear the light in unbearable times" begins a blessing by poet Jan Richardson...

This Advent, may we be ready to serve as heralds, witnesses and midwives to God's Kingdom, at hand and to come...bearing the light of God's love in these times. Amen

There are, as always, a few practical matters to note.

Those of you who receive your circuit mailing by post may find it arriving earlier than you might anticipate over the Christmas season. We are going to post very early during December to ensure that you receive services and other material in good time, even if there is a significant delay in the post approaching Christmas. We hope this doesn't cause too much confusion! There will be written services for each Sunday, and also services for Christmas Eve and Christmas Day included in the mailing for Sunday 20th December.

You should also receive a 'Brief guide to a Methodist Way of Life' over the next few weeks – please do let the office know if you do not receive one by Christmas but would like to.

The Circuit Office will only be open Mon-Wed during December. If you have an urgent query on a Thursday or Friday, please contact me and I will try and help.

Peace, Jo