

23rd April 2020

“Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?” Luke 24: 32

Dear Friends,

I hope that you managed to find a sense of God’s peace, joy and hope over the Easter weekend despite the restrictions we continue to face on our daily lives. I am grateful to Rev Roger Smith for sharing last week’s pastoral letter with you as I enjoyed some time off and I am thankful to the whole Circuit Staff team and the many volunteers in our local churches who are finding creative ways to enable worship, pastoral care and mission to our communities. It is a great testament to what God can do in us and through us even in such difficult circumstances. One of the joys of these days is the opportunity that I know many folk are finding of engaging in worship not just with their own congregation but with others across the circuit, across the connexion and, indeed, across the world. It adds new dimensions to our understanding of what it means to be a part of the Body of Christ on earth.

The weeks following Easter and preceding Pentecost have always struck me as being a peculiar time for the disciples. There is something of “the now and the not yet” about it. They have seen the risen Jesus and yet it still takes some time for them to be convinced of the truth of the resurrection. And it is only on the Day of Pentecost and with the power of the Spirit that we find the new Gospel preached to a watching world. It is a time of uncertainty for them. I wonder how they reflected upon it days, weeks or even years later?

The verse I have quoted above is taken from the story of the two disciples on the Road to Emmaus. It is the set Gospel text in the lectionary for this coming Sunday. In their time of sadness at the death of Jesus and uncertainty as to what their new context will face them with, they are simply unable to recognise Jesus in their midst. Even when Jesus explains the Scriptures to them concerning himself, they still do not see. It is only later in the day when he breaks bread with them that they recognise and understand and can begin to look back on their experience and see what God has been up to.

I have a sense of that about our church life at the moment. We do not know what is happening. We are unsure what this new context will bring. We are trying as hard as possible to make sense of it. We are doing as much as we can to keep it all afloat. But what if God is simply saying to us, “Listen!?” What if God is calling us back to the scriptures in order to get a new insight into who God is and how God works and what God calls us to? What if Jesus has actually come into our midst as we disconsolately trudge through each day not knowing what it will bring and we fail to recognise him because our minds are too consumed with our fears and “what if’s?”

I read a Facebook post from one of my brothers this morning who was reflecting on an experience yesterday of taking his two dogs out for a walk and coming across a field, that rather than being ploughed, has been left fallow. He commented as follows: “Fallow = cultivated land left unplanted to allow it to rest to give its quality or strength chance to improve.”

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The Methodist Church

Sometimes doing nothing can have an important purpose. Sometimes slowing down, doing less, being less or even un-productive, and simply being with God and spending time in God's word, is what we need to regain our strength and discover a new perspective for a new future.

While we are in the midst of this current situation, just like the disciples on the Road to Emmaus, it is hard to see God at work, it is hard to understand just how God might be using it to forge a new future for us. Maybe we need to regain the art of stillness. Maybe we need time to heal from our over-productivity. Maybe we need to give God space and time to speak and all we do is simply listen?

I used a prayer today that I have not noticed before from our Methodist Prayer Handbook. I offer it to you now, written by Rosemary Wakelin:

The world we thought we knew is changing fast,
And longingly we cling to what is past:
That settled life which made no great demand,
A foretaste of the hoped-for Promised Land.

But as for you, dynamic, pilgrim God
You do not linger on the path well trod
But ever lead your pilgrim people on
To risk an unknown future with your Son.

The challenge of diversity and change
Will take us well beyond our former range,
Exposing us to things we do not know,
Demanding all the love that we can show.

You take the stuff of chaos, fear and dread,
And make a path that we can safely tread,
And if we fear the wildness of the wave,
We know your outstretched hand is there to save.

With every blessing,

Tim