

26<sup>th</sup> October 2020

Dear Friends

I have been asked to write the circuit pastoral letter this week as Tim is on annual leave. And hopefully enjoying some well earned and much needed rest!

I look to this coming Sunday, 1<sup>st</sup> November, which of course is All Saints Day in our Christian calendar.

In our Methodist Worship Book, within the Communion service for Ordinary Seasons 1, we find these words for use on this particular day :

***'And now we give you thanks  
for the glorious pledge of the hope of our calling  
which you have given us in your saints;  
that , following their example and strengthened by their fellowship,  
we may run with perseverance the race that is set before us,  
and with them receive the unfading crown of glory'*** (MWB p. 193)

One of the most difficult things for any minister during the COVID pandemic is to lead very small funerals for a select number of relatives and friends wearing masks and socially distancing from one another. Before the guidelines relaxed a little, only five (if that) could attend a crematorium to say farewell to their loved one and ministers were unable to visit the family in person beforehand.

Although current guidelines allow more people to attend, and to hold a church service, many families are waiting until a time when restrictions are lifted for a service of thanksgiving (possibly in a church) at which a larger group of people may gather. One family told me recently that they are going to have a big beach party for their relative down south where she was from and lived most of her life !

It has made me realise how important it is to have that opportunity to say 'goodbye' properly to someone who has died and the emotional distress which can be caused by not being able to do so.

Although, in some senses, All Saints Day has the potential to depress us as we remember those we have lost with sadness, it also presents us with the opportunity to celebrate and offer thanks for those we love but no longer see.

Reflecting on the words above from the worship book, they focus on the hope and rejoicing in the future. They seem to suggest that having had those 'saints' in our lives,

we can be strengthened to face what comes, in life, by our memories of them. Not just the people they were, and still are in our hearts and minds, but through their faith in *where* they now are, and where we are heading.

So I urge you to not to lose heart during these strange times we find ourselves in. Look forward in hope, thank God for what is past. Stay focussed on God in prayer and trust Him to bring us through with the perseverance we need to finish 'the race that is set before us'.

For all the saints, who from their labours rest;  
who to the world by faith their Lord confessed,  
your name, O Jesus, be for ever blessed:  
Alleluia, alleluia!

One holy people, fellowship divine!  
we feebly struggle, they in glory shine  
in earth and heaven the saints in praise combine:  
Alleluia, alleluia!

Stay strong and safe everyone!

Liz

Deacon Liz Day  
2 Marchup Heights Cottages  
Addingham  
LS209 0LQ

The **Methodist** Church 

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