

Rev Tim Perkins  
Feb 16<sup>th</sup> 2022

*“Let us hold fast to the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who has promised is faithful. And let us consider how to provoke one another to love and good deeds, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day approaching.” (Hebrews 10: 23-25)*

Dear Friends,

I remember once hearing the story of an elderly gentleman whose wife had died, and who had somehow simply got out of the habit of going to Church. One day, his pastoral visitor, another older gentleman and good friend called round to see him. For some time the two men simply sat quietly together in front of the open coal fire. Without saying a word, the friend rose from his seat, walked over to the fire took hold of the iron tongues and removed one of the red-hot, glowing coals from the fire and placed it on the hearth and returned to his seat. Again they sat together and watched as the red-hot coal gradually cooled and dimmed until it was simply a dusty grey/black. Then the friend got up once more, returned to the hearth, took hold of the tongues, picked up the now cooled coal and placed it gently back into the fire amongst all the other coals. He returned to his chair and again the pair sat in silence and watched as the coal quickly burst back into life offering heat and light, helping to keep all the other coals alight. The following Sunday, the bereaved gentleman returned to Church and began the slow, gentle process of reconnecting with others who had missed his presence.

It is a story which touches my heart and which resonates with my experience. Time and time again I have seen people leave the church at precisely the moment when they most needed it! I have also heard people say to me that you do not need to go to church to believe in God or express your faith. Whilst there may be some truth in that, I think it is so much harder to live with a flourishing faith if you cut yourself off from the community which is supposed to build you up and which benefits from your gifts. St Paul offers us a number of different images for the church but all of them involve some form of relationship with other believers. Without that sense of support, encouragement, care and being part of a fellowship, our red-hot coals soon begin to dim and lose the purpose for which they were made.

Covid forced us to close our church buildings for a while, and that was perhaps a good thing because it served to remind us that the church is not the physical building but the people of God. Worship can, and indeed does, take place in all sorts of places at all sorts of times. It is right that we continue to offer as best we can opportunities to enable people to participate in worship who, for whatever reason, are not able or ready to return to communal worship in a church building. And we do that by offering online opportunities for worship, housegroups, coffee mornings, and also providing service sheets for those who do not have access to online material.

However, I think there is a temptation that we can easily fall into of just getting out of the habit of going to church, of allowing other things to fill our precious time. The danger is, the longer this goes on, the less likely we are to ever return and that red-hot coal fades and dies.

We have recently worked through our Circuit-wide “Flourish” project which has tried to help us discover how we can flourish in our faith even in difficult times and how we can flourish in our lives and in our churches. I want to dare to suggest to you that it is so much harder to flourish

in any of these ways if we do not reconnect with a worshipping community, be that online or in person.

You may have got out of the habit. You may be fearful or anxious still of covid, you may be classed as an extremely vulnerable person but let me say this to each of you: there is a place for you and a welcome for you and without you there is a you-shaped whole in your church where your presence and your gifts is acutely missed.

As society and the church gets more used to living with covid and living with fewer restrictions I want to encourage you to return to worshipping with your congregation if you are able to. We will do all we can to continue to make all our churches as safe spaces as possible whilst also enabling people to offer their worship and their gifts to God.

Every blessing,

Rev Tim

### **Opportunities for study and fellowship in Lent**

The season of Lent will soon be upon us and it is an ideal time to continue considering what it means for us to flourish in our faith. I list below all the different opportunities across the circuit that I have been made aware of for you to share in, no matter which church you belong to.

Rev Shannon writes: I am planning to offer sessions on Spiritual Formation: drawing close to God through ancient and creative prayer practices. We will explore praying the hours with the Rule of St. Benedict, Lectio Divina, Centering prayer, journaling and prayer walking.

In Addingham this will be offered on **Wednesday evenings, 7-9pm**, (9th, 16th, 23rd and 30th March) in Mt. Hermon Church on Main Street as part of the Addingham Churches Together "Christian Night School."

In Ben Rhydding Church, two sessions will be offered on **Tuesdays**, (8th and 22nd March) from **2-3:30pm** in the Tower. All are welcome!

Rev Roger writes: This year's Lent course in Bramhope will run on **Monday evenings** at St Giles starting on 28th February, **7.30pm**. Rev Matt Broughton will be leading this 8 session course based on the Lord's Prayer. The Prayer Course uses video clips featuring Pete Grieg of 24-7 Prayer. You can view the course at <https://prayercourse.org/> I encourage you to give it a try and explore prayer with our friends at St Giles.

I will be leading a 4 session series on a Methodist Way of Life on **Tuesday evenings** starting on 8th March **7-8pm** at Guiseley and there'll be a service on Ash Wednesday (2nd March 7pm) also at Guiseley.

Burley are going to be using the Archbishop of Canterbury's recommended Lent Book, "Embracing Justice" by Isabelle Hamley. There will be a study group meeting on mostly **Wednesday mornings from 10.00 – 11.30am**, led by Viv Pitts. Dates are: 2<sup>nd</sup> March, 9<sup>th</sup> March, **Thurs** 17<sup>th</sup> March, 23<sup>rd</sup> March, 30<sup>th</sup> March, 6<sup>th</sup> April. They are also planning to host a showing of the Lecture that the Right Honourable Gordon Brown gave as part of Conference last year on the title, "Justice and Hope." This will be on Mon 11<sup>th</sup> April at 7.30pm.

Rev Tim will be following up the online Circuit Advent Course with an online Circuit Lent Course titled, "The Song Forever New," based on the book of the same name by Prof. Paul Wesley Chilcote, looking at some of Charles Wesley's great Lent and Easter hymns and their

modern day equivalents. This will be on **Tuesday evenings at 7.30pm** beginning 8<sup>th</sup> March. The zoom link for this is:

<https://zoom.us/j/5826721156?pwd=bUh5VnpUVkQ4UTJCbIYvQ1NVNHFIz09>

Meeting ID: 582 672 1156

Passcode: 100896

I am sure there will be other opportunities at other churches as well for which we do not have the details yet. Please just speak to your Minister to find out.

### **Lay Employment Panel**

As part of our ongoing commitment to enable all our Circuit employees to flourish in their roles we are seeking to establish a "Lay Employment Panel" as a matter of urgency. This panel will have oversight of all lay appointment processes across the circuit, from developing appointments for the circuit to reviewing and approving appointments for local churches and overseeing the ongoing development and wellbeing of our lay staff. If this is something which you feel you have enthusiasm for and gifts in then I would love to hear from you. It is a matter of urgency because we need to have this team in place before we can progress the plans we have for our Circuit Lay Support Staff Team or agree any new local church appointments.

### **Circuit Teams**

The pandemic has made it very difficult for us to implement some of the ideas from the Circuit's "Planning for Growth" strategy but our intention in the New Year is to focus on developing the work of our Circuit Teams to enable the flourishing of our work in the following areas:

- Children, Young People and Schools Team
- Learning and Development Team
- Mission and Evangelism Team

The aims of these teams are to bring together enthusiastic and gifted people in these areas of work to develop circuit-wide opportunities for growth and to offer expertise and resources to individual congregations who might be seeking to focus on a specific project or area. The nature of our Methodist structure is such that our Churches cannot flourish without the support and input of the Circuit but neither can the Circuit flourish without the support and input of the local Churches. It is all too easy for us to focus on our own small part of the picture but if the picture is to become clear we do need people to serve at a Circuit level not just a local one. Again, if this appeals to you, please contact me at the earliest opportunity.