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**“Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the Gospel of Christ.”
Philippians 1:27**

Friends,

In some ways it is hard to know what to write as we contemplate restrictions on our daily lives that few of us would ever have envisaged or have previously experienced. I am sure that we are all struggling to get our heads around questions such as “why is this happening?”, “how will we cope?” and “what will we do?” both in our daily lives and in relation to our involvement in the life of God’s people in our communities.

Please be assured that our Circuit and Church staff are praying for you at this time, as I’m sure you are for us. That, I believe, is vital to our living through these challenging times, holding one another before God and seeking God’s blessing on each other and this world. The staff team are also working to ensure appropriate pastoral care, especially for the most vulnerable amongst us, and to provide resources for you to use at home for worship, prayer and study. The Circuit website will keep you up to date with these resources. Just visit www.wandamethodists.org.uk

I cannot answer all of the questions that we will each have. However, when I was sat at my desk thinking and praying about what to share with you in this letter, my eyes fell upon the words quoted above from Philippians 1: 27. It is a verse I have read over so many times and paid so little attention to! Perhaps it takes a time of crisis to make us stop and reflect more fully on some of the simple but striking words of Scripture.

These words of Paul were written at a time of personal crisis – he was imprisoned at the time – and at a time of corporate crisis for the Church in Asia – threatened by false teaching, disunity amongst the churches and the rising threat of oppression by the Roman Empire. In such a context, Paul has the courage and faith to write, “whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the Gospel of Christ.”

The renowned Biblical scholar, Alec Motyer, writes of these words, “The force of the words is tremendous, as if Paul had said, ‘This one thing and this only.’ Nothing else must

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distract or excuse the Philippians from this great objective; it must be their all-embracing occupation... to live their lives in a manner worthy of the Gospel of Christ.”

Allow me to encourage you to ask yourself these two questions: “How can I live my life at this time, in a manner worthy of the Gospel of Christ? What might that look like for me and to others?”

So will you allow these restrictions to draw you away from your life with God, your life as part of Christ’s Body, or will you use the increased time at your disposal to draw nearer to God through prayer, Scripture and study?

Will you allow these restrictions to change your character so that you become more concerned about your own life and well-being, which might lead to fear and hoarding, or will you develop ways of living that are kind and generous to others?

How can you live out the Gospel imperative to love your neighbours and your enemies at a time such as this? How can you be involved in re-shaping the mission of the your church to continue to care for the most vulnerable?

These are challenging questions, especially if you are having to self-isolate due to your age or state of health. Some of us will be able to serve others through physical involvement. Some will be able to do so through financial involvement. We are all able to do so through our pastoral involvement by paying attention to the needs of one another, offering a kind word or a smile, making a phone call or sending an email. And we are all able to do so through our spiritual involvement – developing our prayer life, committing to pray for a certain group of people, be they church friends, neighbours, medical professionals, or teachers – the list is endless.

And of course, as we can give – of our time, our talents, our resources, our prayers – so too we can receive from others. Please don’t hesitate to contact your Minister if you need to talk or if there is a practical issue we might be able to help with.

So friends, whatever else happens in the days ahead – and who knows what might be next – conduct yourself in a manner worthy of the Gospel of Christ.

With every blessing,

Rev Tim Perkins