

“As Jesus and his disciples were on their way, he came to a village where a woman named Martha opened her home to him. She had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord’s feet listening to what he said. But Marth was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made.” Luke 10: 38 – 39

Dear Friends,

I wonder if you took up my challenge last week to find simple ways of being kind to yourself, connecting with others and leaning into the life of Jesus? If so, I wonder what you might have learned from it or discovered through it?

On Saturday evening a group of about 25 people took part in Burley’s zoom quiz to raise funds for their Church Charity, *“The Burley-Tereli Friendship Trust.”* It was a great evening of fun, testing our brain cells, seeing different faces and generally just connecting with others (even if the quiz-master did get a bit too much stick for his liking!) It was a delight to welcome friends from around the Circuit – it reminded me that in my previous circuit we had an annual circuit quiz, which was a great way of connecting with one another in a social setting.

But the highlight of the evening was when we were joined by Tenousse Saye and his family all the way from Mali. Tenousee and his family have been instrumental in developing the partnership between the two villages. His children showed us, over zoom, a jumper and a toy Octopus that had been knitted by folk in Burley, which had travelled 5747 miles, via 4 other countries, to get there! It reminded me of the deep connection between all human beings and the connectedness of our whole planet. It was both an opportunity to care for self and to care for others.

The commitment in the Methodist Way of Life that I want to explore this week is *“we will learn more about our faith.”* Is that something you try to take seriously? As with all these commitments, it is easy to be tempted to think that they just happen automatically if we claim to be Christians or take part in worship each Sunday. But is that really the case? More likely, I think, that our faith, understanding, and experience of God will simply stagnate if we are not active in seeking to pursue Jesus.

Jesus’ first followers were called *“Disciples”* and we sometimes talk of our own discipleship. But what does that mean? When I was at secondary school, I was one of a small band of students who choose to study Latin to GCSE – a dying breed now, I fear. I remember how each lesson would begin with our Teacher entering the room and proclaiming *“Salvete Discipuli!”* to which we had to reply, *“Salve Magister.”* (Rough translation: *“Greetings students, Greetings Teacher.”* *“Discipuli”* – where we get the word *“Disciples”* from – students!

Dallas Willard, former Professor of Philosophy at the University of Southern California, and, before his death, one of the world's leading teachers on spiritual formation, suggests the word "*Apprentice*" might be an even better translation than "*student*." An apprentice is one who learns from a Master, often by observation, always by being present in their Master's company – perhaps think of the Jedi in the Star Wars saga as an example. An apprentice is trained to follow on from their Master.

If we are "*discipuli*" of our "*Magister*" Jesus of Nazareth, what does that mean for how we will learn more about our faith? I want to suggest that it means spending as much time in the company of our Teacher as possible, in fact, recognising that our Teacher is always present with us. Our task as apprentices then becomes to learn to recognise Jesus' presence with us, Jesus' activity amongst us, and where and how Jesus is leading us out into the world to live and minister as he does.

The quotation from Luke 10 at the head of this letter gives us a powerful picture of both what it does, and what it doesn't mean, to be a *discipuli*. Two sisters, Martha and Mary, have welcomed Jesus into their home – an act of great hospitality and generosity – something we will consider more next week. But they demonstrate two different approaches to being with Jesus. Martha, we are told, is distracted or preoccupied with all the practical tasks that need to be done when you welcome someone into your home. Those tasks certainly need to be done but is she being a good host?

I'm sure many of us have been there – what is the right balance when you welcome someone into your home of making sure the meal is cooked and presented and actually spending time with your guest?! She is doing the tasks of a host but perhaps is not being the host. And we are clearly led to think that she has the priority wrong when it comes to being a *discipuli*. Mary, we are told has chosen the better option. She has chosen to sit at the feet of her *Magister* and learn from him.

There are all sorts of tasks and actions that are a vital part of being an apprentice of Jesus and living out our faith, but we cannot by-pass stage 1 in the Apprentice Handbook – sit at the feet of Jesus and learn from him. In Matthew 11: 28 – 30, Jesus speaks these words: "*Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.*"

Unlike my Latin teacher, Jesus will not force us to learn from him. He simply extends the invitation. Will you accept it, or are you distracted and pre-occupied by other things? Over the coming week, I encourage you to consider what it might mean for you to be an apprentice of Jesus? What might you learn from him? How might you become like him? What will it mean for you to take on his ministry?

Lent is almost upon us. It is a great time of year to commit to learning more about your faith. You might commit to reading a particular part of the Bible, like I have done (I'm onto Ezekiel now!) or you might take up an opportunity to be part of a Lent Group at your Church or elsewhere in the Circuit. These are just some of the opportunities available:

- Burley & Menston will be looking at the book “Living His Story – Revealing the extraordinary love of God in ordinary ways.”
- Otley are exploring The Methodist Way of Life together.
- Bramhope, Guiseley and Yeadon will be sharing together in creative responses to Mark’s Gospel.
- Christchurch are continuing to explore the Psalms together in their housegroups.

If you want further information on what opportunities there are for learning together in your church then please contact your Minister. If one of the other options catches your imagination elsewhere in the circuit then I’m sure you will be able to join in. Just contact me and I’ll link you up with the right people.

Every blessing,

Rev Tim

Notices

World Day of Prayer 5th March 2021

The World Day of Prayer is a global ecumenical women-led movement. This year’s service has been prepared by women from Vanuatu on the theme “Build on a strong foundation”, looking at the Parable of the Wise and Foolish builders.

As we are not able to meet together you are invited to share in the service which is being hosted by St Mary’s Parish Church, Burley on their website: www.burleyparishchurch.org.uk The service will be on line from 5th March for a week but it would be wonderful if as many as possible could access it at 10.30am on the 5th – as part of our wave of prayer. Children’s resources are also available on line. Anyone from around the Circuit is very welcome to take part.