

Warwick Methodist Church
Keeping in Contact During Covid-19
Number 41 – 17th November 2020

Dear Friends,

Psalm 13, described as *A Prayer for Deliverance from Enemies*, starts like this:

- ¹ How long, O Lord? Will you forget me for ever?
How long will you hide your face from me?
² How long must I bear pain in my soul,
and have sorrow in my heart all day long?
How long shall my enemy be exalted over me?

I'm sure there are many of us who can empathise with the writer. Although we are not facing a literal enemy threatening to attack us with spears and arrows, the metaphorical enemy of Covid is lurking not far away – reaching people we know and care about. My colleague Rev Jeongsook Kim tested positive for Covid three weeks ago and is improving slowly, but still not well. My nephew and his fiancé both have symptomatic Covid, thankfully not too seriously. And we were saddened to learn last week of the death of Don Gabbitas, a member of Dale Street who formerly worshipped at Northgate, who contracted Covid on top of other health problems.

While there has been positive news this week about another potential vaccine nearing the point of being approved for use, we have also been reminded that the vaccines are not yet ready to be rolled out, and the winter lies ahead of us. The press continues to speculate about what will happen after 2nd December.... will Christmas dinner with the family be possible? Or will it be illegal? How long, O Lord, how long? How long until things start to turn around, and we see the signs of hope again?

I want to suggest to you that signs of hope are all around us, even though we don't always see them. I have been encouraged in recent months by the way members of Northgate have come together to respond to the situation with energy and creativity. From the online Holiday Club (thanks, Sarah, Polly and Edwyn) to the window displays (well done, Julie), to the Zoom transmission of services (thanks to Steve and David), to the risk assessments, signage and chair movement (David and team). Behind the scenes, our Pastoral Visitors, and others, are phoning and sending cards and keeping in touch, offering encouragement and social contact.

Now, I know it's difficult – particularly if you are hard of hearing and a phone conversation is not easy to follow. But I hope you recognise that if someone has rung you up, it is a

sign that they care. On the other hand, you may feel that you have been forgotten, that it's too long since someone has been in touch with you. Perhaps it is. We are all human – we all have our own challenges to deal with, and sometimes we take our eye off the ball or don't understand the significance of what another person is going through. It may be that we don't want to pester or intrude, particular if you are a private person, someone who has always seemed to prefer to keep things to themselves.

Does that describe you? Are you feeling neglected or forgotten? If you are, I encourage to reach out. Ring me, or your pastoral visitor, and say you would like a chat. It doesn't need to be anything deep or profound – simply passing the time of day can be a mood lifter. And if you are able to get out for a walk, even a short one, it is so important to do so. It is good for body, mind and spirit.

Those phone calls don't need to be anything deep or profound – but of course they could be. Times of crisis can prompt us to think again about what is really important. In the reflection which I have been doing over these months, there have been questions about what the local church is meant to be about. You may have seen news coverage of an independent church in London which announced in advance that it was going to hold a service of baptism on Sunday. Predictably, the police turned up and stopped it from going ahead.

In the ensuing coverage, some were claiming that this was religious persecution – that it is outrageous for the Government to tell us we can't meet for worship. My view is that is not what the Government have done – they have told us we can't meet people outside our household for *any purpose whatsoever* (apart from one person, in the open air) which is not essential shopping, healthcare etc. It would have been exactly the same if they had been meeting for bingo or ballroom dancing.

What is the church for? There are many ways of answering that question.... to preach the Good News of God in Christ, to worship God together, to support the vulnerable and lonely, to challenge injustice and speak for compassion and peace. What is the church for you – what do you miss... and what have you discovered through this time of difference? What do you long for? How long must you wait?

We still don't know. But we do know that God waits with us. God is with us wherever we are. If you need some help and encouragement to see that, do please get in touch.

Keep safe; keep caring; keep praying.
Barbara

Phone: 01926 740846
Email: barbara.greenwood@methodist.org.uk