

Warwick Methodist Church
Keeping in Contact During Covid-19
Number 30 – 1st September 2020

Dear Friends,

Happy Methodist New Year!! It's that time again – the time when ministers move, new stewards take up their responsibilities, the assessment goes up (and the treasurer hopes that your giving will likewise), all the meetings and groups which paused over the summer start again..... oh, well maybe not this year!!

There is some change here, of course. Rev Peter Powers has left us for Oxford, and today is the first day for the Rev Dr Iain Ballard as our new Superintendent. In the absence of a physical Welcome Service, there will be several opportunities for you to see something of Iain through next Sunday's District live-streamed and Circuit recorded services. Some of you will also encounter him through various circuit meetings and events – initially online, but eventually in person.

Some of our churches will be opening their doors for worship this Sunday – Kenilworth, Dale Street, Stratford and Stockton, while Mickleton will continue with their outdoor service for a few more weeks. At Warwick, we are dipping toes in the water with our Prayer and Reflection times on Wednesday and Saturday afternoons, and the Leadership Team will be discussing, in the light of that experience, when we think we will be ready for Sunday worship.

Speaking of the Leadership Team – the Church Council meeting which met (electronically) in August endorsed a Leadership team consisting of: the minister and stewards, Church Council Secretary, Church and Community Missioner, Chair of the Property Committee, Pastoral Secretary, plus Steve Conway bringing expertise in communications and Sarah Jones to represent the younger element of the church. Its role is primarily to oversee all things Covid on behalf of the Church Council, including agreeing to further openings when it seems right to do so. The team is working hard to stay abreast of the ever-changing advice from Government and Connexion, so that when we do resume more activity, we do so in as safe a way as possible.

During the 6th Century BC, while the people of Israel were in exile in Babylon, the prophet known as Second Isaiah wrote this:

Do not remember the former things,
or consider the things of old.
I am about to do a new thing;
now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?

I will make a way in the wilderness
and rivers in the desert.

Isaiah 43:18-19

Through this prophetic message, God was preparing the people for the return to Jerusalem, and the freedom to rebuild and worship in the temple, as their ancestors had done before. The books of Ezra and Nehemiah tell the story of that return, some of the challenges they faced, and the mingled pain and joy the people felt when they realised that they had not kept the Covenant which God had made with them. But alongside the call to return, was a call to newness – to a realisation that our relationship with God can never be fully codified or constrained.

For many of us, worship in church on a Sunday morning with hymns and a sermon, and occasionally communion, is part of our DNA, it is what our faith is all about. Some are wrestling with the advice to stay away because of their own health vulnerability; others are nervous of coming; still others will not come until there is singing and a cup of coffee afterwards – both of which are probably a long way off.

Surely the question to ask about worship is not where it happens, how long it lasts, what it consists of – but what difference it makes to us. In John 4:21-23, Jesus tells the Samaritan woman: "Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem... But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth."

Over these months, we have found other ways of worship, other channels for pastoral care. Over the months ahead, we have the opportunity to restore some, although not all, of the former ways of working. The important question is – do these things enable us to worship in spirit and in truth? Do our prayers make us more Christlike, more compassionate, more loving? To the extent that they do, they are worth doing. And if they do not – well, then we are like the people of Israel after their return to Jerusalem, who wept when they heard the Book of the Law being read, and realised how far they were from God's purposes.

God is all love, all grace and all compassion. God longs to embrace us, support us and heal us. That is not restricted to 10.30am on a Sunday morning, or to the Methodist (or indeed, any) Church; God will speak to us and hold us, wherever we are, as long as we are willing.

Shall we invite God in?

Keep safe; keep caring; keep praying.
Barbara

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