

Warwick Methodist Church
Keeping in Contact During Covid-19
Number 31 – 8th September 2020

Dear Friends,

Last week it turned chilly for several days and on our regular walks, David has been commenting how the leaves are starting to turn. Autumn is upon us. One morning, I noticed that the central heating controller – one of those all-singing all-dancing modern ones which allows you to specify different temperatures for different times of day – wanted the heating to be on, but the radiators were cold. The following day it was cooler still, and it became clear the heating was not going to come on. Fortunately, the engineer was able to come out within a few days, and all is now well.

As I sat at my desk this morning, I kept glancing out the window at the lovely blue sky and white fluffy clouds.... and the traffic queuing for the temporary traffic lights where they have dug up the road.... and only when I went out to fetch some milk just before lunchtime did I realise just how warm it is today. It is as if summer has returned.

Still, we are all getting used to things being topsy-turvy. As I walked home with my milk, a bible verse popped into my mind: "Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season" (2 Timothy 4:2) This advice, purportedly from the apostle Paul (though probably not actually written by him) to the young pastor and evangelist Timothy, has a message for all of us.

Timothy had a calling – to share the Good News of God's love shown through Jesus Christ. Implicit in this quote is that there are good times and bad times to be doing that – times when it is easy and straightforward, and times when it will be an uphill struggle. Timothy is urged to prepare himself, as best he can, to fulfil his calling however favourable or difficult the circumstances might be.

What is our calling as members of the Church of Christ? Well, Jesus said many things to his first disciples about what they should do. They included loving God, loving our neighbour, sharing with those in need, trusting in him and following him; the New Testament letters include similar injunctions to persevere in faith, be kind and gentle with one another, to sing hymns, Psalms and spiritual songs, be diligent and hardworking, to take care of those who are in need. Out of all of those, it is possible to weave many different versions of what the Church is called to be.

Historically, Methodism has always sought to embody two different emphases in Christian living: the first is personal faith, piety and devotion, nurtured through prayer, worship, bible study and class meetings (or house groups, as we would probably call them now); the second is acts of compassion to those in need, including running soup kitchens and

foodbanks, offering pastoral care, and working for social justice more broadly. While most of us would probably veer more towards one of these more than the other, the Church continues to declare that both are important and that each supports the other. We also increasingly recognise that there are many, many ways to live out both the spiritual and the social aspects of our discipleship.

The Covid situation has put a stop to both spiritual and practical aspects of our Church's life, in that we could not meet for worship, or prayer, or run coffee mornings or offer our premises to community groups. But we could pick up the phone, and send letters, and pop things through doors; we could put up posters, send donations and join community groups supporting people who were self-isolating; we could worship via YouTube or Facebook, hold house groups via Zoom and send worship resources to those who don't have internet access.

The last few months may feel like "out of season" for being the Church of Christ, but as they say, necessity is the mother of invention. While restrictions continue, we will adapt and do the best we can to fulfil our calling as Christians and as part of Christ's body.

Our calling is.... what? What, for you, is the most important aspect of being a Christian and a member of the Church? Do you hold in tension those two aspects of personal devotion and loving service, or do you lean strongly to one side or the other? What nourishes your personal spirituality – are you a contemplative, or an out-loud pray-er? Do you talk freely about your faith, or ponder and puzzle things quietly in your own head? Do you pray best in solitude, or like to worship in a great throng? As to the practical – is your contribution about going places and being with people and doing things, or is quiet, in the background, able to done from home with phone and computer?

Depending on your answers to the above, you may have found that the circumstances have put a complete stop to the ways in which you normally live out your faith, which must surely be very hard. Or maybe, just maybe, you have come into your own, discovering abilities you didn't know you possessed.

As we continue to watch and wait, remember that instruction to Timothy – Be ready, in season or out of season. Whether you find it all difficult and depressing, or are getting by quite well, the call is the same: Love God, love your neighbour. And know that your efforts, however partial, are in themselves a way of loving God.

Keep safe; keep caring; keep praying.

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