



**Holiday Club in a Bag – wow! Thank you to Claire and the team.**

**Rev Ruth – we say farewell...**

**Reminders of God’s promises to Noah..**



The **Methodist** Conference



**Ah Moi (Josephine) Soon**  
The Wolverhampton and Shrewsbury District  
Vale of Stour



**Rev Josephine received into full Connexion at the national Methodist Conference Online!**



**September 2020**

**Letter to the Vale of Stour Churches**

Dear sisters and brothers

As this splendid summer draws to a close and we look ahead to the changing of the seasons, it is clear that COVID-19 is here to stay for quite some time yet. We see around us the beginnings of the culturally dangerous blame game with President Trump calling it the “Chinese virus”.



In truth, Covid has served to highlight much of the pre-existing weakness and self-interest that underpin our modern global culture. Thankfully, it has also drawn out of many a fresh commitment to love and service of each other and a new appreciation of those who work in community based roles.

Sadly, some Christians have jumped on this bandwagon claiming they know why God has sent this and what God is trying to say through it all. Phrases like this is a sign of the end times, a sign of God’s anger and judgement on a sinful world...

*Matthew 12:38–39* <sup>38</sup> Then some of the scribes and Pharisees said to him, “Teacher, we wish to see a sign from you.” <sup>39</sup> But he answered them, “An evil generation asks for a sign, but no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah.”

Despite Jesus offering many amazing signs of his identity and power, when people asked for more he reflected back to them their request as evidence of their unbelief. They wanted faith to be simple and straightforward; ‘show us a big sign Lord and then believing in you will be easier...’, but signs should not be necessary for faith. Jesus could have come amongst us surrounded by an army of angels, in a chariot of fire, glorious beyond imagining... But no, this is not God’s way. If it were, our faith would perhaps be rooted in fear or awe, both of which are fragile and short lived, because their foundations are not rooted in the enduring and resilient strength of love.

Instead, Jesus came in all humility as a baby; no big show of might, just God’s offer of welcome to all, from shepherds to foreigners. And as Jesus rebukes his audience he reminds them of Jonah – cast into the

belly of a fish for three days and nights. By recalling this sign Jesus was demonstrating that they had already decided to reject Him. Because for Him to fulfill this sign, he would have to be rejected, die, and be buried. For this sign to be accomplished, it would mean they had already rejected him as their Messiah and King...

Its important to remember that the signs Jesus brought us were not negative but positive as he turned water into wine, brought healing, food for the hungry, sight for the blind and life for the dead.

Yes, God rails against sin but in the incarnation of Jesus Christ – God with us – we understand God no longer in the imagery of the old covenant. In Christ, God has provided the way to separate us from our sin and make us one with him again. All the old ways and old signs are replaced by one new and ultimate sign - the life and death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

*Matthew 24:3–6 Signs of the End of the Age*

*<sup>3</sup> When he was sitting on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to him privately, saying, “Tell us, when will this be, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?” <sup>4</sup> Jesus answered them, “Beware that no one leads you astray. <sup>5</sup> For many will come in my name, saying, ‘I am the Messiah!’ and they will lead many astray. <sup>6</sup> And you will hear of wars and rumours of wars; **see that you are not alarmed**; for this must take place, but the end is not yet.*

So when we face such tremendous and global trials, when we see around us war and famine, flood and pandemic, Jesus offers us wisdom to discern his way and says ‘stay calm, trust in me...’

May God bless you and keep you safe in the weeks to come.

**Rev Alan Combes**

*The peace of God comes close  
To those caught in the storm,  
Forgoing lives of ease  
To ease the lives forlorn.  
The Peace of God is here to stay,  
Embracing all who walk his way.  
(StF 654 John L Bell and Graham Maule)*

## **News from Around the Circuit**

**We pray for Rev Ruth and Nigel** who have now moved, remembering them as Ruth enters ministry in the Black Country Circuit.

**A new minister joins us....** We rejoice at the arrival of the Reverend Helen Croft. She will have pastoral charge of Brierley Hill, Overend and Lawrence Lane. Her welcome service will be at Brierley Hill on the evening of 6th September where our guest preacher will be the chair of district – the Reverend Rachel Parkinson. Sadly, due to social distancing requirements, there will be only one representative from each church at the service but it will be filmed and made available a few days afterwards on the circuit website virtual player.

**Martyn Filsak changing role...** With Helen’s arrival we are exploring some changes to Martyn Filsak’s role. We hope to ask him to support Rev Michael (details TBC) and Rev Alan at Dudley Wood and Providence. We remain blessed having Martyn’s pastoral and preaching skills amongst us.

**Provision of Worship** - physically, on paper and online:

Lawrence Lane has been open for personal prayer and fellowship for quite some time and now joins the preaching plan from September as does Wollaston halfway through September. Other churches including Providence, Dudley Wood and Amblecote Wordsley are completing their risk analysis and will open for prayer and fellowship. Please bear with us as we try to expand the preaching plan whilst remaining very short of preachers.

We also recognise that there are still many who cannot safely come to church, so we continue - as we have done since April - to provide a weekly full text service sheet that can be used at home or as a ‘readers’ service at a church without a preacher. Please speak to your senior steward if you want to receive this sheet.

## **Action for Children and Project Gambia**

Thank you to those who have recently supported these creative fundraising events which have included cake and cream teas delivered to people’s doors.