

October 2020

Letter to the Vale of Stour Churches

As our Covid journey continues and the threat of a return to lockdown looms, it is important not to lose sight of the sustaining patterns of the Church year. This discipline is something we can all cling onto in the face of uncertainty...



The summer has passed and here we are already into another year. I have always felt that Methodism has at least three new-years...

There is September – when ministry teams change and the cycle of meetings that work from the local church towards conference next year begin. This is our on-going commitment to be connexional, to the wider sharing of our resources, to lay and ordained working together to seek what it means to bring the light of hope of Jesus to this place. If we trust in God, apprentice ourselves to Jesus and let the Holy Spirit in, who knows what is possible...

Then, if I dare to mention it, Advent is not far away – the start of the liturgical year and the great sweeping Biblical stories of Advent, Christmas & Epiphany, followed closely by Lent, Holy week - the darkness of Good Friday and the glorious light of Easter Day – pushing on through to the birth of the Church at Pentecost (a fourth new year perhaps!). Here I love the never ending sense of story, that God walks with us in amidst the muck and complexity of it all, from Peter's denial to the Emmaus revelation that Jesus is alive, journeying by our side, standing in solidarity with us in the face of the storm, guiding, stilling and sending the Holy Spirit to go before and within.

And in January many Methodist Churches celebrate the unique and rather special Covenant service which reminds us that all we are is bound up in covenant relationship with Father, Son and Holy Spirit who call and enable us to bear witness to God's saving love in Christ whatever our situation or place in the world. I am comforted to know that through this covenant, God enfolds us in generous and gracious love that is not dependant on our deserving.

I wonder if we have three new-years because in reality we are all pretty poor at keeping our new-year promises? It's always good to have another chance to get it right, to be better and after all - we give thanks because we believe Christ on the Cross is all about the great redemptive story of the cross and second chances...

With Rev Josephine's reception into full connexion, Rev Helen Croft's arrival and a rebalancing of our circuit stations there are many new starts going on, despite the stilted nature of our Covid context. So we pray for all involved in new beginnings.

Isaiah 43:18-19 says: "Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past. See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it? I am making a way in the wilderness and streams in the wasteland.

The first of three new-year's has already come and gone. Together, let us face Covid boldly, walking forward in faith seeking out the new, creative and refreshing things God is preparing for us to do.

God bless you and stay safe. **Rev Alan Combes**

Circuit News

- We continue to be grateful for the provision of home based worship materials, activities and an ongoing commitment to pastoral calls which are much needed by many folk not online.
- Rev Michael has met the Rector at Kinver to build local links there and he is exploring the Methodist stages of mission toolkit.
- Rev Josephine and Birch Coppice are putting together a new afternoon worship service in partnership with the Baptist Church...
- A special project team led by Rev Helen is looking at how Brierley Hill Manse might be used to support the Brierley Hill Project who engage with the vulnerable in our local communities.
- Claire Biggs and team have been busy creating online resources for Children and young families.
- Jayne Corns, Elaine and Rev Alan have been completing safeguarding DBS applications.
- Across the circuit there have been a wide range of fund raising activities for several key charities whose donations are down.
- Our online Church has had an upgrade and over 35 connections enjoyed Rev Helen Croft's first venture with us in online preaching!
- We continue to provide weekly full text service sheets that we hope you are receiving at home and can be used for Local Arrangements.
- Circuit meeting reaffirmed support for the Komera Partnership in Rwanda. This helps Methodist ministers complete the new requirement of holding a degree in order to continue their ministry. Talk to Rev Helen or invite Rev Peter Clarke to speak at your church.