



The Methodist Church

United Stockport Circuit (Manchester and Stockport District)

A Message from the Superintendent Minister

April 14th 2020

My Dear Friends,

As we continue this period of separation and isolation, I write to you as a way of offering reassurance that in Christ, and within the fold of our church family, we are never, in reality, separated or alone. The story of the Resurrection which is at the heart of Easter that we continue to celebrate this month, tells us that with God's help, nothing is impossible. With love, care and compassion we will come through this. Which is not of course the same as saying we will not be affected by it; some of you will have lost loved ones to Covid-19, or know people who have; some of you will have been seriously unwell yourselves. There is no denying the deep sense of crisis and trauma that we are all sharing, even if we are lucky enough ourselves to be free from the virus. More than ever at this time we realise the truth that whatever affects one of us affects us all. More than ever at this time we realise the truth that God does not take away our suffering but lives with us through it and weeps with us in the face of it.

In the weeks immediately following Easter we usually reflect on some of the appearances of the risen Christ, and I invite you over the next two weeks to take a look at the following passages and see how they speak to you.

In **John 20:19-31** The risen Christ appears to the disciples and offers them peace. Thomas, who wasn't there at first doesn't really accept it and it's only when Jesus appears and pronounces peace for a second time that he does believe.

In **Luke 24:13-35** some disciples meet Jesus on the Road to Emmaus, but they don't realise it is Jesus. Only when Jesus breaks some bread and shares it with them do they recognise him.

In both these stories we see the genuine humanity of the disciples of Jesus – doubting and not seeing what is right in front of their eyes. For Thomas, it was too much to think that Jesus might come back and offer them peace! After all, they had run away, deserted him in his hour of need. Surely if Jesus was to come back at all it would be to chastise them, to rebuke them. But no, when Thomas hears for himself those words of peace he doesn't even need to touch Jesus, he is reminded of the life of love and forgiveness which Jesus lived among them, and in that he can see and recognise his Lord clearly.

For the Emmaus travellers, it was not Jesus' words, nor his mannerisms or way of walking which revealed him, but the breaking of bread, recalling the last supper and Jesus' offer of the New Commandment to love one another as He had loved.

It is in Jesus' radical life of service, peace, forgiveness and love that he becomes visible to those who meet him. And so it is today. Each one of us has a part to play in making Christ visible, tangible and present. We have become the peace-bringers and the bread sharers. This is the meaning of resurrection – that Christ's call to fulfil his mission remains alive in those who call themselves his followers and friends. We are those who bring God's salvation to one another in the many ways we seek to meet one another's needs. Many of us are giving time to support those who are self-isolating and housebound or unwell. Those who are self-isolating and housebound and unwell are making phone calls and offering prayers for others. And thanks to you all. When I stand on my doorstep and applaud our wonderful NHS staff I am also applauding all of you who

are doing what you can to deliver physical and spiritual comfort to others. Just as Jesus met the disciples in their fragile, doubting, humanity, so too does Jesus meet us in ours. Life does feel fragile and confusing at present, we are living with great uncertainty about the present and the future so I offer you the words of this hymn, of which I was reminded recently, which I wrote some years ago in the face of a particularly difficult time. If you would like to sing it to yourself you can do so to the tune *Unde et Memores* (the hymn 'And now, O Father, Mindful of thy love'). I do believe that God meets us in our humanity which is of God's creation, and if you wish to be reminded of the presence of Christ in a very real way, as you read or sing these words, do take some bread and break it and know that others will be doing the same. And remember that we will meet again soon (to quote Her Majesty!) around the table to which we are all invited.

The narrow path that reaches out to sea;
A flock of birds, returning, flying free;
Our course of life is rarely quite as clear,
The mystery leads us through the doubt and fear.
And there within the depths of our mistrust,
God finds us, re-creates us from the dust.

The howling wind embraces what we feel,
In chaos everything can seem unreal,
We struggle through the only way we know,
Embracing any simple sign of hope.
And there within the depths of our despair,
God touches us with dignity and care.

There are so many stories to be told,
Of folk like you and I who have been called,
To prophecy and priesthood of all kinds,
Who found a love that opened up their minds.
And there within those narratives of grace,
God bids us gently, each, to find our place.

Around the table Jesus Christ has set,
There is potential undiscovered yet.
This moment puts all others in their place,
For here we meet our Lover face to face;
And here we find the truth is plain to see:
God's greatest gift is our humanity.

Please remember as always:

In this time of isolation and separation may we feel the unity of God's spirit in the bonds of peace and love which connect us to one another.

- **When we feel lonely let us know that in Christ we are never alone.**
- **When we feel isolated may we be reminded that within the worldwide Body of Christ we are always connected.**
- **When we need a hug help us to feel the warmth of God's embrace**
- **When we are compelled to keep our distance, may we be drawn close to each other within the Spirit of Companionship that flows from God and which moves through and between each one of us.**

May I wish you all every blessing this Eastertide.

Rev.Cathy

NOTICES

- **Financial Giving**

Please remember to maintain your financial giving to the church as much as you are able. If you already pay by Direct Debit then that will continue as normal. If you use envelopes, please fill them each week and put them to one side to bring to church when we are able to meet again. If you put in cash, please also put this to one side, or keep a note of what you would have given and offer it when you come back to church. If you would like to set up a direct debit at this time please let me, or one of the other ministers know. It is really important that we maintain our income as much as possible – we will lose income from our regular users, yet our normal church expenses will continue much as always. So to be assured of our regular congregational giving is very important. Having said that, we recognise that the current situation may well impact some of you financially in a very challenging way and it is not our intention to make life more difficult for you. If your resources need to be diverted at this time, then we also understand that.

- **Worship**

For as long as we cannot open our churches, it is hoped that there will be a **live act of worship** every Sunday (probably at 3pm but please check) for the United Stockport Circuit led by the ministers and others via the Internet application Zoom. You can join with a video link and see and hear everything and everyone else who is participating, or you can join just with audio, *or you can telephone in*. Please keep an eye on the Circuit website www.stockportcircuit.org.uk for up to date information and log in details each week; or if you are not online, ask someone to phone you and keep you updated.

In addition, every **Sunday morning at 11am** – when we would all normally be in worship in church – we are encouraged to pray the following prayer. This way we stay connected in a very really and tangible way.

God of Love and Life,

We pray to you this morning for the life the United Stockport Methodist Circuit, for our sisters and brothers who belong to:

(pausing briefly to reflect after each name)

Christ Church Methodist /URC

Davenport Methodist Church

Dialstone Lane Methodist Church

Edgeley Community Church

Hazel Grove Methodist Church

Heaton Mersey Methodist Church

Heaton Moor United Church

St. Johns Methodist Church

Tiviot Dale Methodist Church

Trinity Methodist Church

Windlehurst Methodist Church

In this time of isolation and separation may we feel the unity of your spirit in the bonds of peace and love which connect us to one another.

We worship you, we give you thanks, we praise you for your glory.

We ask that this time of crisis might pass and that those who suffer might find comfort and strength within the knowledge of your grace, revealed through the kindness and compassion of the people of God.

Eternal God,
Though the self-offering of your Son
You have filled our lives with your presence.
Help us in our sufferings and trials
Fill us with hope
And strengthen us in our weakness.
Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

- **Volunteering: The Greater Manchester Homelessness Faith Network** (Chaired by our Methodist City Centre minister Rev Ian Rutherford) are looking for volunteers as follows. Please respond directly if you are able to help.

Food and welfare packages

Can you help source, package, and deliver dry food and essential hygiene items? If so, please send exact details of sources of food and items, packaging locations, and delivery capability to Homelessness@greatermanchester-ca.gov.uk.

Supporting 'Safeguarding Vigilance' on-site in alternative accommodation

Can you provide DBS checked staff to be re-deployed to work out of Hotel locations and provide generic support to guests? If so, please send exact details of hours per day and staff roles to gm-covid@streetsupport.net

- **Jubilee Debt campaign**

A petition has been organised recognising the impact of the pandemic on countries already vulnerable to debt. Please read the letter below and see if you would like to support this campaign.

Hi friend,

The economic crash caused by coronavirus has pushed indebted countries even deeper into debt crisis. The call to cancel debts for the most vulnerable countries is gathering speed. The impacts of the pandemic could spell enormous problems for countries already ravaged by war or natural disasters. Most people in these countries depend on selling farm produce and raw materials for their livelihoods. Not only are they getting less money for products like copper and coffee, the cost of borrowing has shot up. A double whammy for those worst off. We have an opportunity to make a difference. Soon world leaders will meet to discuss the crisis and we can send them a strong message. We are demanding urgent debt cancellation. Please add your voice here: jubileedebt.org.uk/actions/stop-coronavirus-debt-disaster. Thank you.