

CHRIST WELL UNITED REFORMED CHURCH, MANSELTON

29th July 2020

Dear friends,

Christian greetings. You may be getting this letter slightly earlier this week, since I have an appointment at the opticians on Thursday morning – hurrah! I was able to go to the dentist to have a lost filling replaced yesterday – I never thought that I would be so pleased to go to the dentist!

The ‘nature’ of August is now becoming clearer for me. I have to take some annual leave, which I will do between 7th August and 21st August. This means that there will be no pastoral letter on either 13th or 20th August, and I will not be leading Sunday worship on 9th or 16th August: somebody else will be taking on this responsibility. There *will* be a letter on 27th August and I will be leading morning worship on 23rd and 30th August. I will also be in the manse garden between 2pm and 4pm on Sunday 30th and Monday 31st August; the side gate will be open for you and there will be some clean, socially distanced seating outside. I won’t be providing refreshments, since I want to prioritise conversations! Feel free to come and have a chat before I ‘finish’. If it is pouring with rain... well, I will be sitting in the porch with the door open: the event goes ahead, but I understand that people won’t stay very long, even if they come armed with an umbrella. Naturally, we want to keep these afternoons as safe as possible, which is why I won’t be able to invite anybody into the manse: it is virtually empty anyway!

This Sunday, we will welcome some ‘new’ folk to our live morning service by phone. If this includes you... well, I trust that you will not find things too strange. You will hear my voice as worship leader – also the voices of the reader and Rob and Alison as they lead the music. You will hear many voices before and after the service as folk share in conversation... and you will be able to be a part of this. Communion will form a part of the service this Sunday.

The key reading this Sunday is Matthew 14.13 – 21. We will be singing, ‘Be still, for the presence of the Lord’ and, ‘A rich young man came seeking’ to the tune St. Theodulph. We have never sung the words of the second hymn before (I found them in the Methodist Hymnbook, ‘Singing the Faith’), but so far as I can tell, it is one of very few hymns which references the Gospel reading directly (The Feeding of the Five Thousand). If you want to sit and listen, of course, this is fine.

The reading follows on from the story of the death of John the Baptist. In spite of the fact that it contains the words 'privately', 'solitary' and 'remote' – Jesus clearly felt that he needed some time to himself – Jesus still prioritises the needs of the crowds who sought him out. The sick were healed and the crowds were fed. Jesus tried to pass on some responsibility to his disciples – 'You give them something to eat' – but it was Jesus who directed the crowds to sit down on the grass and it was Jesus who took the bread and the fish. How do we feel – respond – when much-needed space feels 'invaded'? How does our faith help us in these situations?

And yet... well, I wouldn't want to downplay the part played by the disciples in this passage. Although, the miracle is Jesus' doing, the disciples are invited to play their part by making the seating arrangements, distributing the food and clearing up afterwards. Amazingly, five loaves and two fish had become a banquet for 5,000 men and unnumbered women and children, with a great deal left over for the disciples – more than they had started with. In what ways do you feel actively involved – engaged – empowered for the ongoing practical work of the Kingdom of God? Whilst there is necessarily a prayerful, internal part of faith – 'being' – there is also a highly practical part of faith – the 'doing'. Paul understood this very well, when he talked about 'faith and works'. How do we achieve necessary balance in our lives?

I hope that all goes well with you and that no one feels isolated at this time.

With much love in Christ,

Your friend and pastor,

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