

CHRIST WELL UNITED REFORMED CHURCH, MANSELTON

9th July 2020

Dear friends,

Christian greetings. I have been in touch with Andi and Nina in recent days. Both are well. By way of news, some extracts from emails follow – I have left the grammar untouched! *'Based on what we hear through the media, the situation in the UK is quite bad. What are your thoughts on that? Has Christ Well been affected badly? We hope that everybody is alright. Would you mind sending the church members our regards, if you have the chance to? Can you already worship again? Here in Germany, it is possible, but we can't sing in church and we have to keep distance from others. Nina and I are well. We are planning our next important steps: Nina has started a practical training for her time at Uni, and I have applied for a voluntary service here in Berlin... It's nice to hear how everybody is working together to get through the crisis. Being somehow enriched through a crisis is always a good thing, and maybe it can also give ideas for the future. I feel like the Manselton is the perfect community for putting forth a lot of dedicated volunteers. It's also a good sign that Unity in Diversity is still very active. That is probably a good thing for both volunteers and visitors... We both think it would be nice to visit Swansea again, but we are not quite sure as to when that is going to be possible'*. I sent our love and will keep you in the picture as I get more news.

A word of thanks from Ken, the church treasurer: folk have been generous and consistent in their giving during the last few months, and people have been prepared to change the ways in which they give. Thank you – this is appreciated greatly.

This Sunday, the key reading is Matthew 13.1 – 9, 18 – 23 – a familiar passage – and we will sing, 'Seek ye first' and 'Dear Lord and Father of mankind'. It is interesting: the parable of the sower itself is delivered to the crowds, but the explanation which follows is offered to the disciples, in response to a question about the meaning of parables. The parables remain powerful 'picture' stories; anybody who has tried to write a new one will know how difficult it can be to get the words exactly right! Within the church, it is wrong to confine 'story telling' to children – all ages can enjoy them and gain from them. I quite often listen, to 'Book at bedtime' on the radio... and, when leading devotions at church camps, I would often work my way through a 'story' during evening

devotions. A friend who is a minister in Blackburn has managed to keep the church magazine going during the last four months, largely because members of the congregation have been willing to commit their lockdown stories to paper.

In Matthew's Gospel, the different growing situations are offered as pictures, metaphors for different responses to the word of the Kingdom of God. We shouldn't grow disheartened today when we perceive indifference or active dislike as a response to the Gospel: this has always been the case. This is offered as a very realistic parable: Jesus acknowledges that those open to his teaching could well be in a minority. Indeed, there is something quite contemporary in the way in which the story is 'unpacked': we still encounter distraction by forces against God, hostility from others, the worries of life and an overriding concern for wealth. Yet 'good soil' remains also. We are not always very good at knowing where to find it, just as our sowing methods have clearly not been very effective in recent years. We have learned that we *can* take on board new ideas and methods during recent months, however, and this is encouraging as we look to the future of our congregations.

If you would like to receive fuller notes for Sunday worship, let me know and I will pass on more material to you. Equally, if you are not online, but are interested in accessing Christ Well's live Sunday worship by means of 'phone, have a word with me: we are trying to take stock of whether this would be a popular move.

Your elders had a good meeting on Tuesday this week. The Synod is offering training on, 'Risk Assessments in response Covid-19' and, 'Preparing for a return to Sunday worship' during the next few weeks and a number of us will be sharing in this training by means of Zoom. Be assured that we seek to be proactive rather than reactive as we prepare for the future.

With much love in Christ,

Your friend and pastor,

Neil