

Dear Friends

I was in Keighley the other day and had to fill the car up with petrol, so I stopped at the Texaco station on Hard Ings Road, just by MacDonald's. It used to be known as Almarr's garage. When we lived in Keighley, it was owned by a member of our congregation in Utley, Alan Marr. He and Kathy became family friends and were a great support to us as a young married couple, new into the area and just starting a family. Sadly, Alan was diagnosed with advanced prostate cancer. This was, of course, a blow to him and his family, but he decided to turn a negative into a positive and found opportunities to talk to men's groups about the importance of getting regular health checks, encouraging them to talk about such taboo subjects and to, as he put it, "regularly check your bits". He admitted that he had put off going to the doctor, or to talk with anyone about his health, and that had cost him. He wanted others to not make the same mistake. He wanted the men he addressed to know they were not alone.

This is the last Sunday in the church's year, the Sunday before Advent, and as I look back it is not the year I expected in November 2019. I had not even heard of Corona Virus then - the first human cases of COVID-19 were not identified until December - but the year has been defined by it and its effects.

However, it turns out that there is another disease that is rife and just as destructive as Coronavirus, or cancer, in its own way: *loneliness*.

This week we have heard some terrible statistics about the loneliness that is happening due to this virus and its consequences. And yet, if we are honest, rather like Alan and his cancer, we have known it has been there for a long time, it is just that some of us have not been checking regularly. Now, this virus has again brought this issue out onto the open and got us looking at it. There is no vaccine for this disease but there are remedies.

Talking can help. This week I had a long chat with someone I know who doesn't come to church. He works with others during the week but admitted that when he gets home he is alone and he just feels miserable. I had actually rung him about something else, but he obviously needed to talk and appreciated the friendly ear. I have made a note to ring him again.

And then I saw the report on Look North about the guy who was so lonely he was talking to his chairs, who through the project "platform one" at Huddersfield station is now fixing bikes for the kids around his estate, is happy and laughing. If you want to know the story you can read the report by following this link. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/extra/aoyyqz3jg4/lockdown-loneliness>

So, my friends, this leaves us with a question: what are we going to do about the loneliness that is around us?

Again, talking can help. There is a great line in the song by Elbow, *New York morning*:

*Oh my God, New York can talk, Somewhere in all that talk is all the answers
Everybody owns the great ideas, And it feels like there's a big one round the corner.*

Guy Garvey, reflecting on the positivity that he found in the chatter of New York life; the feeling that it was like a clattering machine, every person being an important part as it works towards producing some big idea that perhaps could solve the world's problems.

Is that what St. Paul was meaning when he wrote "you are the body of Christ"? I think so. God has brought us together as church here, with different gifts and ways of thinking. We have all that we need to be that body, and somewhere in all of that there are the answers. So, perhaps you could join me in putting some

thought and some chatter towards this. We have a gospel that proclaims that you are not alone, not rejected but loved and included. How can we best put that into practice?

Next Sunday, Advent Sunday, we have a celebration of an answer to a similar question posed in Uganda. Please do join us at 6pm on Zoom - information is in the news sheet - to give thanks for our part in the life of Revival Centre, and hear some good news about how some answers are being found to loneliness and hunger there.

Although we are unable to have 'church' in church at the moment, which makes that chatter a bit more difficult, we can open the church up for private prayer. I find being in church helps to clarify some of my thoughts and prayers and sometimes makes it easier to hear what God is saying. Having done a bit of local research amongst my clergy colleagues, and weighed up the risks, I have decided, as a bit of an experiment, to open the church Tuesday to Friday, 1pm – 4pm for individual private prayer. The main door will be open, but the back door shut, so if you have any access issues but would like to bob in please ring me on my mobile 07851639605 and I can arrange to let you in. Covid safe instructions are on the board as you enter.

As I mentioned earlier, this Sunday is the last of the church's year. It has the theme of Christ the King. I think there is something deeply profound about having that theme at the end. It reminds us that Christ's work over sin and death has seen victory and Christ is now on his throne. But it also reminds us that our work as his subjects continues until we finally reach that throne ourselves. It seems fitting to finish this last letter for the church's year placing Christ as king before us, and recommitting ourselves to his service. Here is a helpful prayer, written by Christine Sine, which I found on The GodSpace website:

*Let us praise Jesus Christ our king
for the wonderful things he has done.
He sends out his word to heal us.
He satisfies the thirsty with the water of life.
He fills the hungry with the abundance of his kingdom.
Let us praise Jesus, redeemer and renewer of all things.
May we always trust in his goodness and love,
And have faith in his grace and mercy,
May we always believe he cares about justice and righteousness,
And draw our life from his eternal purposes.
Let us praise Jesus Christ our king and saviour,
May we be filled with the hope and promise of his coming,
And give our lives to follow him.
May we be gripped by his kingdom ways,
And walk with assurance and trust into his grace and peace.*

And all the people said "Amen!"

Blessings to you and those you love and care for.

Peter