

### Lockdown Experiences

It has been a very strange few months since lockdown began. Coming to terms with events being cancelled, the familiar rhythm of corporate Sunday worship being disrupted and simply not being able to see familiar faces as before.

Soon, new ideas and experiences began to fill the gaps left by the old way of doing things. Zoom meetings and webinars, terms I never used a year ago have become second nature. There was a week when I had no phone or internet at home which was very difficult. Modern technology had to give way to the simplicity of reading and praying. I discovered that this almost monastic way of life made me fidgety! Contemplative spirituality is an aspect of my personal Christian growth I know I need to work on.

As we move forward into the unknown future. Unsure of what our church life and experience will become, we can echo with confidence the words of John Wesley, "Best of all, God is with us!" Angela

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Preparing for the 'At Home' worship over the past few months has led me to take a closer look at some of the hymns in Singing the Faith that are unfamiliar to me. One such hymn is no. 684, the first verse of which has seemed especially pertinent during lockdown and continues to be relevant as we move into the uncertain months ahead. Liz

Here on the threshold of a new beginning, by grace forgiven, now we leave behind our long-repented selfishness and sinning, and all our blessings call again to mind. Christ to redeem us, ransom and restore us, the love that holds us in a Saviour's care, faith strong to welcome all that lies before us, our unknown future, knowing God is there. Timothy Dudley-Smith (b1926)

### Circuit Harvest Festival - 18<sup>th</sup> October

The 'At Home' worship for Sunday 18<sup>th</sup> October will take the form of a Harvest Festival. It won't quite be the same as meeting in our own buildings and we may have to use our imaginations to capture the smell of vegetables and the scent of flowers, but we will be able to share in traditional harvest hymns and feast our eyes on some beautiful and colourful images.

### **Churches Reopening - a note from Rev Liz:**

There are now three churches in the Circuit which have either reopened or are planning to reopen shortly. The initial planning etc has been time consuming and, in each case, has called for commitment from a small group of people to put things in place but it has been achievable. It is the decision of each Church Council as to whether they feel ready to reopen with the current restrictions in place. I am very happy to have a conversation with anyone regarding reopening and can meet with small groups at your building to talk through what is required if that helps.

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At the recent Circuit Meeting Ruth James and Dean James were appointed as Circuit Stewards joining Alan Partridge, Barry Searle & Barbara Dalton

### A Prayer for Autumn

Lord of the seasons,  
there is a time for dying  
and a time for new birth;  
a time to speak  
and a time to keep quiet.  
Help us discern your will for us now.

Lord of autumn leaves and warm berries,  
help us to let go gracefully  
and to rejoice in the colour and fruitfulness of this moment.

Wrap us in the shawl of eternity  
and teach us to await with wonder  
the new shoots of your love

Mary Hanrahan

**Autumn Church Councils** will be held on the dates already agreed. Until we can meet face to face the meetings will be held via Zoom. Further details will be sent to Church Council members nearer the time.

If you, or any of your family or friends, are on Facebook please remember that the West Devon Methodist Circuit does have a Facebook page. A daily verse and prayers are published here.

### **Latest advice from the Methodist Church**

On Monday 14<sup>th</sup> September the Government changed the guidelines for social gatherings. Full details of how this may affect our church activities can be found on the Methodist Church website. However here is a summary:

The number of people legally allowed to meet socially, both indoors and outdoors, has been reduced from 30 to six. This will apply to all gatherings. Places of worship can stay open for communal worship and can host numbers larger than six, as now. The capacity limit for each place of worship should be set by what is possible within COVID-secure social distancing guidelines for that building.

The main change for places of worship is as follows: if you are attending with others, then your group should not exceed six people. This group of six can be made up of people from outside your household, but must maintain strict social distancing from other groups or individuals.

The only exception to this new rule is where a single household (or support bubble) contains more than six people, but the same rules on social interaction should apply. No person who lives separately to this household or support bubble is permitted to accompany this larger group. This replaces previous rules where groups could be larger than six people if they were made up of two households.

If house groups or prayer groups are planning to meet again in private homes the following must be adhered to:

- meet in groups of 6 or less
- follow social distancing rules (where you cannot stay 2 metres apart you should stay more than 1 metre apart, as well as taking extra steps to stay safe. For example, wearing a face covering).
- limit how many different people you see socially over a short period of time

## THE METHODIST CHURCH - WEST DEVON CIRCUIT NEWSLETTER - SEPTEMBER 2020

- meet people outdoors where practical: meeting people outdoors is safer than meeting people indoors because fresh air provides better ventilation. If meeting indoors make sure rooms are well ventilated by keeping windows and doors open.
- When with people you do not live with, you should also avoid - physical contact; being close and face-to-face; and shouting or singing close to them. You should also avoid touching things that other people have touched.



What is God saying?

### Bridget Down shares her reflections on a recent time of child-led worship and how her children responded to what they'd heard from God through art.

In the stripping away of the rhythm of Sunday's, our family quickly adopted the curiosity and wonder of the children. This seemed the natural thing to do: to be real and engaging. It wasn't forced but organic, and has helped us all value the sacred in our lockdown environment.

Each Sunday we've encouraged the children to take turns holding the attention of the family to bring a sense of focus on a theological awareness of their choosing, to encourage us all to hear, see, feel God in the sacred space created. There has been such a spectrum of ideas, spaces and mediums used – it's been brilliant!

This week our youngest, Barney who is eight, took us on a trail from our house to a redundant mobile home that lies dormant on our farm. As it was evening, he asked us to follow a lamp he had found with a candle lit.

As we followed him the lit candle and melted wax swung around the lantern. The excitement of the adventure made the moment special; it stood apart from the normality of the day we had lived. Into the caravan we trooped – directed to our seats, full of dust and mites! Our 'leader' sat at a rickety table set up with the lantern as a focus. 'Oh no' the Bible had been forgotten on the journey. But, never fail one of the teenage children had it on their phone! Zacchaeus was the chosen story, a favourite with our children (told and retold numerous times over the years). But today it was different, as the messed-up candle, splattered against the lantern tried to shine its light, our youngest gave us two questions to think about: 'Why should we hide from God?' and 'Why shouldn't we hide from God?' At first, I struggled to see the link he had made to ask these questions, but by the end I was thankful for this moment.

He gave us time to think about these answers and then asked us to feedback. I was itching to correct from the beginning of the first enquiry, forcing myself to hold back the words. Everyone in that moment silent in thought, scribbling answers on the scraps of recycled paper we had been given. Barney's dedication to writing full sentences with his reply; determination on his face,

tongue slightly out, signifying the importance he bestowed.

As we each shared our answers in turn, it became very apparent each person had reflected on this story, this moment differently. I hadn't answered the first question, in my mind – hiding from God is not a possibility, but the depth of answer from our four small companions were deep, raw and real. This seemingly impossible question did in fact have an answer.

To end our time together we were told we'd be playing a game of hide and seek - in the mobile home! Again, my doubt of how this would go was soon brutally disposed with the instruction: "Mummy' you will count to 20. You need to go outside to do that". As I disappeared, I could hear the thumping of running and panic as the remaining five all found their hiding places. On my return all was eerily quiet in the caravan, too quiet for our troop! I found two children who had made half an effort to hide quite quickly, my husband squidged himself into a caravan wardrobe, another child was under the sink but where was Barney? Finally, he was found under the 'sofa'. We congregated afterwards to be dismissed with a prayer, direct from the heart, very much in the present, as the words reflected our time together "God help us to shine out to you, even if we are a bit messed up like this candle, help us not to try and hide our naughty things we've done, Amen"

The children have spoken ad-hoc about Sunday since. Jack, who's nine and the easiest to find in our game, sidled up to me yesterday saying "Mum, I was easy to find as you know...you can't hide from God". This comment came out of the blue, with no context: it was simply a moment when he had remembered and wanted to bring the conversation to the surface again, to quickly be replaced with "What's for supper?"

I encouraged us to record our reflections differently, some have tried photography and others paint, all unique and all perfect, if not very conceptual and certainly interpretive! But to the artist incredibly meaningful and they've certainly got me thinking!



Barney's Art (aged 8) The Story in Rich colours and in Poor colours "because Zacchaeus was poor until he was found by Jesus"

Jack's Art (aged 9)

'No-one can hide from God not even the me flying to the ISS'



Alfie's Art (aged 11)

'Zacchaeus hid up the tree so he could see Jesus, but he didn't want him to see him as he didn't think he would be wanted by God'



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**Old Age** according to Mark Twain- age is an issue of mind over matter. If you don't mind it doesn't matter

*Edited and produced by David Shott*