

Dear Friends,

We use some lazy shorthand in our Christian talking at times don't we?

'Such things are sent to try us' - I don't believe in a God who deliberately makes us suffer, however, I do believe that suffering can result in discoveries of strength and resilience, if we tackle our difficulties with a faithful openness to God. (See Romans 5: 3-4 'suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope', and 1 Peter 1: 7 'even gold passes through the assayer's fire').

'All things work for the good' the actual quote (Romans 8: 28) is 'In all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose'.

Such wisdom has been hammered out by Christian and Jewish writers and thinkers, as well as wise sages in other faith traditions over the centuries, and is enshrined in some of our sacred stories and texts.

Two of those big Old Testament stories I am returning to time and time again at the moment are the stories of Exodus and Exile. Exodus was when God's people sought freedom from oppression in Egypt as slaves, and then having got that freedom had to learn its responsibility as they wandered in the desert. Exile was later in their history when they were oppressed again, this time by invasion, and some made their way eventually back 'home' and rebuilt.

What fascinates me even more is the way these stories in our Bible were told and retold, edited and revised to suit new times, and used to make meaning of the people's current experience.

For example, my understanding is that most of what we call the Old Testament was edited and revised into the form we have it now just after that exile. As the people re-built their city and faith and temple in Jerusalem about 600 years before Jesus they remembered their hopes in exile, hundreds of years before, and wound them in with their experiences of exile, and built a new future.

Into that process spoke many of the prophets, especially Jeremiah, the weeping prophet. It was his job to remind the people that they wouldn't be returning to the golden age, but building a new future, in which faithfulness to God in their own generation was the most important.

In Britain we have been revising our own history, as we have heard the phrase Black Lives Matter, we have been reminded of Churchill's racism, and we have to understand protest, believe in peace over violence, yet come to terms with the racism that exists in all of us at this time. Meanwhile lockdown has maybe exaggerated strengths of feeling as we watch the news, follow social media, and get het up over enormous issues that require study, understanding, acknowledgement and then change.

As a nation we still have to get to grips with our racism, and we have to change.

Christians believe in Jesus, whose self giving love is emulated in the prayer:

*Make me a channel of Your peace
Where there is hatred, let me bring Your love
Where there is injury, Your pardon Lord
And where there's doubt, true faith in You.*

As we begin to speak of reopening churches, I believe these days of crisis cause us to ask a poignant question, not when, but why? Exodus was a time of dreaming of freedom and new life. Looking forward to rebuilding after Exile was a time of self examination - why? Now is the time many of us have spent our lives waiting for in the Methodist church - a time to do things differently, discover a new vision, make a new church. Now is the time when we can find resurrection and let go of that which has been dead for some time. Now is the time to ask, before we do our risk assessments and health and safety audits - Why?

Brian D. McLaren gives several prayerful exercises in his book Naked Spirituality, I would commend this one:

Why?

Why must it be that

Spend some time describing what has happened that has brought us to this place.

I had hoped

What were we hoping for that has now been dashed and disappointed us?

In the middle of this pain and confusion I affirm

What good is now possible with God, what do we believe, what can we build on?

Many of the hopes of ancient Israel after their Exile developed into their hope for a Messiah. When Jesus appeared, he fulfilled many of those hopes for justice, healing, forgiveness, and inclusion. He dashed the hopes of those who sought the superiority of Israel, exclusive access to God by religious law keeping, and he revised the view of who God was and what he was like - self giving Love.

I believe God is working for the good in our midst, our calling is to seek out what are his purposes at this time in our lives and our history?

Seek the Lord, and his ways, and live well.

God bless,

Rob

Superintendent Minister

The Methodist Conference is currently taking place. Originally scheduled for Telford the conference is now taking place via Zoom. A live stream is available from the Methodist website for anyone who wishes to observe what is happening. <https://www.methodist.org.uk/about-us/the-methodist-conference/conference-2020/conference-live-stream/>

Welcomes and Goodbyes

Rev. Gary Windon is departing the circuit this year. A farewell service will take place on 2nd August, 6:30pm, with more details to be announced once they are known.

We will be joined by Rev. Robin Fox. A welcome service for him will be held on 6th September, 6:30pm, again more details will be advised nearer the time once they are known.

Church Reopening

Following on from the governments latest announcement on the opening of churches the Circuit are looking at the safest and best way of starting to reopen churches. This is not a quick process and the safety of all concerned is the number one priority. An update will be provided to individual churches once a plan has been formalised.

How to...

There are some helpful 'How To' guides on the circuit website for using Zoom and Skype. They were prepared by Jonny. Please use them to help you familiarise yourself with these technologies to help keep in touch with friends and family.

Fundraising

The Circuit website has been updated to include a Fundraising page. This contains links to All We Can, MHA and Action For Children to enable you to donate to these charities during this time. If you wish to give all you have to do is visit the fundraising page and click on the link next to the charity you wish to donate to, JustGiving take care of the rest. At this time of year we would normally be holding collections for these charities which we are not now able to do so please consider making a donation to help those in need both in this country and further afield. Charities are one of the worst hit sectors in the pandemic as they have received no government help.

You can donate anonymously or leave your details.

Please also keep giving your collection to your church. Each church has its own different systems in place so please contact your church representative to find out how. Even putting aside your collection each week so that you can give it when the church reopens will make a big difference. Even though church buildings are closed the church still has a large amount of costs.

Our Website has been cleared of all Calendar events for the time being: however posters are being added if they contain helpful information about available assistance in the current situation.

Daniel Keen
Circuit Administrator



Circuit News – July 2020

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New Posters on the Website:

<http://www.cheshiresouth.org.uk/>

CLICK ON PUBLICATIONS - Information posters only

*Please forward information to be put into the next Circuit Newsletter to
1108info.cheshiresouth@gmail.com or phone **07745 235253** by Wednesday 29th July –
Thank you*