Wrenbury & Nantwich Mission Area **Methodist** Churches

**Newsletter No 11. 7 June 2020**

As many of you are aware, I’m spending the majority of my time currently at my mum’s in Sedgley as she enters the final stages of her earthly life. I’m privileged that I am able to spend so much time with her, made so much easier by the fact we are in lock down so I am able to do the majority of things I was doing in Nantwich, 50 miles away. I miss seeing many of you as I delivered some of the newsletters, but am so grateful for everyone who is ensuring the weekly service sheet is still delivered, particularly Pat who assembles, edits, copies and distributes all the sheets. It’s quite an operation! So thank you all so much.

Thank you too for your love and your prayers, they are very much appreciated. Please don’t feel you can’t contact me, or you don’t want to bother me. I may not be able to respond immediately but as soon as I can I will !

It’s a bit of a roller coaster at the moment spending so much time back at mum’s in Sedgley. For those who don’t know where Sedgley is, it’s between Wolverhampton and Dudley in the “Black Country”. When Queen Victoria passed through the Black Country by train she ordered the blinds to be closed in her carriage! Well, Sedgley is the “posher” bit of the Black County on the top of a hill.

Mum and Dad were from hard working, working class families, living in a council house with my grandparents. Dad was a toolmaker for the Cannon. The year I was born he took the huge risk of leaving a secure job to become self employed as a market trader (which he did successfully for the rest of his working life). We were all expected to be involved. I think I was about 5 when I started work on the markets. It was a great way of learning mental arithmetic, and instilled in us a very strong work ethic. I remember my younger sister being put in a cape apple cardboard box under the counter for naps. When we came home from school, it wasn’t “*get your homework done”* but come and help unload the van and “*mark up”.*

My parents had Christian values, but didn’t go to church. For as long as I can remember I have always believed in God; we had good Christian assemblies at school and I read my children’s Bible. It was when I was at secondary school about 13 the girl I sat next to in class invited me to a Sunday School anniversay. I had no idea what one was, but was allowed to go to Upper Gornal Methodist Church in the Gornal & Sedgley Circuit. The minister at the time was Rev Paul Smith. The church was packed, loads of children and young people were taking part. It was a vibrant, joyous and welcoming place. I was invited to be part of it and I wanted to be involved. I had never experienced anything like it before in my life.

On a youth weekend away I gave my heart to the Lord, and over a period of time my sister and parents did too.

Today’s Old Testament reading from Isaiah 40 triggered a memory from about 1984 when our circuit was planning a tent crusade in Sedgely park, which happened to be across the road from my parents’ house at the time. I don’t know whether it was having youth on my side then, or being part of a very evangelical circuit, we were all very excited about this week-long mission. We had endless volunteers, setting up and taking down the marquee, security, stewards, choir, catering ……. I was heavily involved in the organising of it. I remember my dad giving me a piece of paper with the words from Isaiah 40:30-31 that I don’t think I’d ever read before. My dad wasn’t a Christian at the time, so it was even more meaningful that he had given me words of scripture, considering how months before he would follow me to see if I was really going to church, and constantly ridicule me, or have little digs about being a *“chapel wench” or “God botherer”.*

*“Even youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall, but those who hope in the Lord, will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles, they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint”*

I’ve walked across the park a few times recently, but it’s reading this scripture that has really reminded me of that amazing week of incredible worship and fellowship and many people coming to know the Lord.

Sedgley has many happy memories, it’s a place where I came to faith, was nurtured and discipled in church. I belonged to a youth choir “Rock Foundation” with over 100 members, we travelled the country taking services and concerts, sharing testimonies. It’s the place I married and had my girls.

Sedgley is also the place of unhappy memories, a place of rejection and divorce, never being good enough, letting so many people down. So it’s an uncomfortable place to be at the moment whilst watching and waiting for my mum to slip away, seeing the torment she is in at the moment, hearing her cry out for help but not being able to make things better.

I do have hope and faith, my youth is in the distant past and I am weary, but I do have the assurance my strength will be renewed from the Lord.

Some of you may remember that for Christmas my girls gave me a sky dive experience, which I should have done this week. I’m not sure what their motives were ? (I’m sure it was nothing to do with the fact that I gave them copies of my will last year, or whether they just think I need a bit of excitement in my life!) I was really looking forward to the feeling of soaring like an eagle on the free fall. I wasn’t looking forward to the initial drop out of the plane (I would definitely need to be pushed), or the landing, but the bit in the middle, I think would have been incredible. Well, like everything else it’s been postponed, so I wait a little longer to soar on the wings like an eagle.

If you are feeling weary at the moment, weary of the isolation and uncertainty, then I pray that God will give you the strength as your hope is in our Lord. We’re putting our trust in our politicians and scientists to make the right decisions for us, our health, the economic well being of the country and to care for our planet.

We must continue to pray and put our trust in the Lord, the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He will not grow tired and weary. Lift your eyes and look to the heavens. Our hope and our future come from God.

**With love and prayers, Jill x**

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Maths Teacher: "If I have 5 bottles in one hand and 6 in the other hand, what do I have?"
Student: "A drinking problem."

Maths Teacher: " If your father earns £500 a week and gives half to your mother. What will he have?"
Student: "A heart attack."

Q: Did you hear about the kidnapping at school?
A: It's okay. He woke up.

Teacher: "Which book has helped you the most in your life?"
Student: "My father's cheque book!"

We are indebted to Geoff Mace for many of the jokes and stories we include, just supplemented by other people.

From **Rev. Rob Hilton** - Superintendent Minister. (Unfortunately arrived just too late to include last week.)

Dear Friends,

Greetings from our locked down home to yours! We remain very much in lockdown awaiting a small operation for our son in the next few weeks. It’s an operation we weren’t sure would happen, it’s good news that he can have it, and it’s something we have waited 14 months for, and we won’t know whether it will have been successful or not for another few months.

Waiting is so often what life can be about at times.

I am conscious of more forms of waiting that have been going on:

Firstly, in the Christian story we remember throughout the year, we have been between Ascension and Pentecost, a time of waiting for those first Christians as they were finally deprived of the physical presence of Jesus, and awaiting his new form of presence in the Holy Spirit. They waited and they prayed.

Secondly, ‘Wesley Day’, 24th May, just gone, is the day remembered by Methodists as the date of John Wesley’s conversion. He had long been awaiting the assurance of God regarding the state of his own salvation, ever since he had gone as a Missionary to convert ‘the Indians’ (I think he meant native Americans), and asked himself ‘Oh who will convert me?’. He was waiting and praying.

Thirdly, we await the end of lockdown. When can we go back to our churches and return to normal? Meanwhile we wait, and at home, in different ways, we pray.

We’re getting used to that well worn phrase ‘new normal’, in so many ways things will never be the same again. Many of you will know this in your own experience or that of someone you have known, loved, or lost. Those first Christians got used to the Holy Spirit as the spirit of Jesus yes, but something else, something more, and when they had to agree to mission outside the Jewish faith, and recognise God was working in the lives of Gentiles, they really had to get used to a new understanding of what this loving, outgoing God was about. Similarly, we will not return to normal in church life.

Waiting affects you. I remember reading through the play ‘Waiting for Godot’ with some friends, one of whom was a Drama graduate. As we read the play, reading one line straight after another, our friend said ‘No, wait, there’s a gap’. It’s a brilliant play about waiting - time ticks by, nothing happens, then nothing happens again! The future seems to go unreachably further ahead of us. Yet in the very act of waiting for it, we are, like the butterfly pupa, affected, changed, formed, and maybe radically transformed by the waiting.

John Wesley was set on fire when his heart was strangely warmed and he found his blessed assurance. He set off round the country unstoppably preaching the gospel of God’s love. His brother wrote hymns by the thousand, putting their experience of God into poetry and song so that Methodism had a folk music pulse throbbing through its mission.

I also write in the midst of the national prayer initiative ‘Thy Kingdom Come’ which, by its very title, causes us to stop and wait. To pray ‘Thy Kingdom come’ is to let go of our busyness and business, and wait for God’s business to appear. Many of us who are reflecting on these lockdown days are finding that waiting with a silent God is all we can do. Rushing to get back to normal is a denial of the new thing that God may be doing.

There will be plans for reopening church buildings with social distancing and cleaning, but unless we wait to see what God is saying at this time, we may miss an opportunity for God’s Kingdom to come in a way God desires.

It is more important in these days to ask where God is in these strange times.

It is more important to seek out what God is doing.

And it’s of the utmost importance that we listen for what God is saying. Even if, as on the first Sabbath, God is silent.

‘Thy Kingdom come’ is a prayer, it is a prayer of alertness, of being awake, and of waiting on God. While waiting, we discern afresh who God is, what God says, and what our lives as part of God’s purposes and meaning might be.

Wait, and pray.

That’s what the 12 disciples did before they became apostles. It’s what the Wesley brothers did before the Methodist movement took off.

It goes against the grain, it goes against what we want. But I believe it’s the greatest need for Christians in these days.

Wait, and pray.

God bless,

Rob

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**As we celebrated Pentecost** last weekend I heard or read somewhere that “The Spirit doesn’t come like that these days”. In his book ‘Like a Mighty Wind’ Mel Tari tells the story of a great Christian revival in Indonesia in the 1960s (recent, on a timeline of 2,000 years), when events like those we read about in the New Testament became a common occurrence. One night as a church prayed a rushing sound was heard, as if a small tornado had hit the church, yet with nothing to see. Instead of the usual orderly system of one person praying at a time, 200 people started to pray at once, causing the pastors great shock and anxiety – the church was out of control!

Then a fire bell was heard ringing at the Police Station across the street. Having no fire engines, people came running with buckets and suitable receptacles. All saw the flames, yet nothing was burning. That night many people received Jesus as their Saviour and also the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Many were not familiar with these concepts, but God opened their eyes and taught them not to rely solely on the Pentecost experience of many years ago. He was looking to do a new and great thing among them.

[In case you question the authenticity of this story, a record remains in the Police Log that the whole community witnessed fire but the church building was totally undamaged.]

 It is true that the Spirit does not always (usually?) come so publicly or dramatically. For good reason the sequel to this book is entitled ‘The Gentle Breeze of Jesus’, so varied are His ways of working. Elijah met God not in the power and tumult of the earthquake, wind or fire, but in a still, small voice.

In our previous church we had the privilege of working with a wonderful group of teenagers. They met regularly with us and sometimes together without leaders. One evening a dozen of so aged about 15 to 18 were packed into the small church vestry. They themselves could not say what precise words had been spoken, but they were praising God and asking for his presence. Suddenly one of the girls began to talk ‘gibberish’, and before the surprise could really sink in, others also started to pray in a language they did not know. Each of them was filled with a new and awesome sense of the power and love of God. They went on to grow by leaps and bounds in their Christian lives and discipleship, and although not appointed to official positions of authority, in very real terms gave a lead to the whole church.

Some time later, while in prayer, one of the men received a mental image of that church building, but the communion table had been replaced by a bath. It was full to the brim not with water but with God’s love and grace. The adults stared at it from afar, or advanced gingerly and sipped a spoonful, or the bolder ones a cupful. The young people arrived and just plunged straight in. Some of the older folk complained about the mess they were making! This gave us a strong message – what was God trying to say?

Did God not promise to “pour out his Spirit on *everyone***:** men and women, old and young, will see visions, dream dreams and proclaim his message”? (Joel ch. 2) Individuals, churches and communities can be reborn, revitalised, totally re-created by God’s Spirit *today*. We must dare to dream whatever vision he gives us, and be open to that Spirit. *Pat Maidment*

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**Lightwood Green** are having short telephone acts of fellowship at 6.30 on Sunday evenings.

Dial-in number(s):   **0844 4 73 73 73** (Shared cost from landline) **/** **87373** (Shared cost from mobile)

 9**87373** (Shared cost from O2 mobile) **Enter Guest PIN: 571297**