

## Deacons Thoughts...

Last week I attended the Convocation of the Methodist Diaconal Order. It was a time of mixed feelings, joy at seeing all the deacons, but grief that we were only joining through the internet. We Zoomed. For four days we connected in a zoom room and for many of us we felt completely exhausted at the end of it with the concentration and intensity of an internet conference. However, some fun was thrown in - a panto and a quiz, both testing the ability of individuals to mute appropriately. The overall feeling was that it was a better experience than most of us expected but we long for the time when we come back together in person.

During Convocation there were four things that stood out for me:

1. Jonathan Hustler (Secretary of the Conference) spoke of all the rainbows that we see in the community (and I thought of those that have been so lovingly knitted and placed on the hedge for people to 'find' at Padgate Methodist), and suggested that we are still in the ark, awaiting the sign of the rainbow to indicate that we are ready to move on and out of confinement. He asked us where we found ourselves in the ark? And spoke of the Gospel leading us to a new sort of community. A new creation of life and hope for all, where the Creator is with us, even through death, to life on both sides of the grave. Death puts living into perspective and the hope that we have in Christ is the counter-point – accepting that we are forgiven is the key to sharing the Gospel of life and hope.
2. Barbara Glasson (President of Conference) spoke of stories and the power of enabling people to share their story. This is likely to be an important element for helping people through, and from, the present crisis. She went on to talk about the story that Jesus told in Mark 2 of the healing of the paralysed man and asked us 'what if it is a paralysed church that can't walk?' We want to get the church to Jesus but does the church want to come to Jesus? What does it look like to bring the church to Jesus? This idea was discussed, leading on to: Where am I in the picture? How do we bring the community to Jesus? Does our community want to get well? In what ways? – all interesting thoughts to ponder.
3. As part of our celebrations we would usually hold two communion services, one at the start of Convocation and one at the end. But in Methodism we don't do communion virtually. The reason for this was explained very well. It is about sharing, not about eating together. Jonathan likened it to ordering an Indian meal. Some order a specific meal for each person, others order a selection to be shared amongst everyone. Only the latter is a parallel to communion, eating from the same pot, not just eating together. And so, with this teaching in mind, we didn't have communion, but with our separate drinks and biscuits/cakes/crackers, we held a wonderful love feast. It was meaningful and at the same time left the yearning that one day we will be able to come

together in person to celebrate communion, and what a celebration that will be!

4. During our final service there were songs to sing. We were asked to mute as there's nothing quite like 190+ deacons all singing along at slightly different timing to the backing track! The introduction began and a lone deacon's voice could be heard. She was unaware that we could all hear her and every attempt to mute her failed! It was lovely. It wasn't about the quality of her voice, but more about us being a dispersed community singing with one voice. And that's where the church is at the moment. We are dispersed, in lockdown, but all seeking to follow Jesus and reflect his love, light and hope in these difficult times.

You are not alone!

Be encouraged.

On those days when it all feels too much and the pain of loss of normality / grief of bereavement / loneliness of isolation is overwhelming, know that you are not alone. God is with you and we are held in the prayers of each other, and of Christians across the world, because as one part of the body of Christ hurts, so the pain is felt in every part.

And so, I leave you with a prayer that I pray each day, from the Lectio 365 app (part of the 24/7 prayer movement):

Father, help me to live this day to the full,  
being true to You in every way.  
Jesus, help me to give myself away to others,  
being kind to everyone I meet.  
Spirit, help me to love the lost,  
proclaiming Christ in all I do and say.  
Amen.

Stay safe

Shalom

Helen

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