



Yorkshire North & East Methodist District

PASTORAL LETTER FROM THE DISTRICT CHAIR, THE REVD LESLIE NEWTON

January 2021

Dear friends

Firstly, may I assure you of my good wishes and sincere prayers for you and yours at the beginning of this New Year.

As we look back over 2020, we recognise how deeply we've been reminded of the unpredictability of life. At various points through the year I've been prompted to recall the phrase: 'we may not know what the future holds, but we know who holds our future.'

Of course, that statement can only actually ease our anxieties when we're caught up in challenging circumstances if it is grounded and arising out of a living faith.

Similarly, the Covenant Service prayers that many of us will offer this January (one way or another) require a good deal of faith for them to make any sort of sense. They invite us to express an open-hearted willingness for our lives to be wholly shaped by God.

The Good News is that we are invited to do this in response to the amazing commitment that God has already made towards us. With perfect love and amazing grace God in Christ has drawn close to us. That is at the heart of the Christmas message: God with us - Emmanuel.

In Luke 5:1-11 we have another powerful example of God coming close. Here, Jesus steps into Simon's boat. He does so at a time when Simon is fed up with his lot. Simon is tired from a long night's fishing with no catch to show for it. But into that place of frustration and disappointment comes Jesus. He comes, he speaks, and he opens up a new way forward.

An oft-quoted reflection about Covid-19's impact has been to recognise that although we're all caught up in its storm, the seaworthiness of our boats varies tremendously.

I wonder how life is in your boat now? The boat that is your home, your workplace, your family, your church? Where is life frustrating or disappointing for you? Your health, your relationships, your finances, your livelihood?

Luke 5:1-11

Once while Jesus was standing beside the lake of Gennesaret, and the crowd was pressing in on him to hear the word of God, he saw two boats there at the shore of the lake; the fishermen had gone out of them and were washing their nets. He got into one of the boats, the one belonging to Simon, and asked him to put out a little way from the shore. Then he sat down and taught the crowds from the boat. When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, "Put out into the deep water and let down your nets for a catch." Simon answered, "Master, we have worked all night long but have caught nothing. Yet if you say so, I will let down the nets." When they had done this, they caught so many fish that their nets were beginning to break. So they signalled their partners in the other boat to come and help them. And they came and filled both boats, so that they began to sink. But when Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, "Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man!" For he and all who were with him were amazed at the catch of fish that they had taken; and so also were James and John, sons of Zebedee, who were partners with Simon. Then Jesus said to Simon, "Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching people." When they had brought their boats to shore, they left everything and followed him.

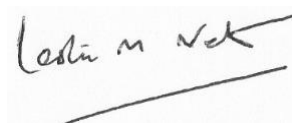
The Good News is that just as Jesus stepped into Simon's boat, God comes into your boat; and not just to be *with* you – wonderful as that is – but to be *for* you, offering hope and transformation.

I'm so glad for this reminder of God's faithfulness as I come to make my Covenant Prayer again. Yes, the words are demanding, but God's grace is sufficient. God is with me in my boat, offering new ways ahead – even if that will mean I need to step out of my comfort zone, or accept what I can't fully understand. God will be more than enough, even when life is at its most challenging. God is more than enough. Always.

Finally, please let us take time and care to remember one another, all in our various boats. Some of us will be having a particularly hard time of it. Others will be facing difficult decisions and choices.

As we ask God to be “gracious to us according to his loving kindness” (Psalm 51:1), so may we seek to be - in our day-to-day relationships - gracious, loving and kind towards each other. May the quality of our relationships be one of the signs to the world of just what a transforming difference it really does make to have Jesus in our boat.

Every blessing for the New Year.



I am no longer my own but yours.
Put me to what you will,
rank me with whom you will;
put me to doing,
put me to suffering;
let me be employed for you,
or laid aside for you,
exalted for you,
or brought low for you;
let me be full,
let me be empty,
let me have all things,
let me have nothing:
I freely and wholeheartedly yield all things
to your pleasure and disposal.
And now, glorious and blessed God,
Father, Son and Holy Spirit,
you are mine and I am yours. So be it.
And the covenant now made on earth, let it be ratified in heaven.

Covenant Prayer

Please know of the ongoing care, prayers and support of ministers and lay leaders around our District. If you're struggling to find the support you need, please contact the District Office at admin@yorkshiremethodist.org or on 07809 431871
