

Letter to WSAM churches

21st May 2020

Dear Friends

I hope you've had a good week. Are you finding it slightly tricky sometimes to remember which day of the week it is? I know I've had that problem once or twice, and apparently I'm not alone. A lovely cartoon appeared online this week to mark Mental Health Awareness Week: Pooh and Piglet are sitting together on the grass, blowing dandelion 'clocks'. Pooh asks, 'What day is it?' and Piglet replies, 'It's today'. Pooh is contented - 'My favourite day', he says. I hope we can all have a few favourite days as we enjoy the sunshine, the blue skies, and the flowers around us - whether they be bright yellow dandelions (beloved of bees and small children) or something more exotic.

I've been noticing the wonderful blue skies this week - skies crossed by birds in flight, fluffy white clouds, and a few vapour trails from planes (just starting to appear again). As I write this, it is Ascension day - when we remember how, after the resurrection and several appearances to the disciples, Jesus returned to heaven. The book of Acts tells us that, "as they were watching, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. While he was going... they were gazing up towards heaven..." (Acts 1:9-10). For thousands of years people believed that heaven was above them - just beyond the blue bowl which they thought they were seeing. Don't we still refer to the sky sometimes as the heavens? So perhaps, as we think and pray about our concerns for the present and our hopes for the future, it's appropriate to turn our eyes to the sky - to stretch our minds by remembering that rather than a blue bowl, we are looking at the vastness of space which goes on and on.... out to infinity... When I was a student training for the ministry in Cambridge, we had an Ascension Day service each year, at which it was traditional for fireworks to be let off, as everyone looked upwards into the sky and went 'ooh' and 'aah'. It is important sometimes that we, like the disciples, 'gaze upwards towards heaven'; only then will we remember that this world, wonderful as it is, is not all that there is.

Please consider...

In recent weeks, sections of the press have been clamouring for churches (by which they mean our buildings) to re-open. But the churches themselves are concerned to get the timing right, which means not yet! Of course it will be wonderful to gather together to worship God with our friends and wider community; but sometimes in life you can't go straight back to how things used to be... you can only move forwards into the future. The Coronavirus isn't going to go away - we have to learn to live with it. We want to show our love for our neighbours, as Jesus taught; and that means we must avoid risking harm to

them by spreading the virus through our families, friends and communities. The church is people, who are alive, and open - only our buildings are closed.

News

Firstly an update - Dave is still doing well, much to the relief of Irene and the family.

Nicky has been quite ill and Dave and Isla have also been affected. We send them our best wishes and continue to hold them in prayer.

Revd Bill is also not well at the moment, and we think of him and hope he feels a lot better soon.

Some of us were glad to be able to share, via a video link, in the funeral of Douglas; and hear of his earlier years and commitment to Methodist ministry. Some rousing old-fashioned hymns were sung, chosen by Douglas himself.

Good news: it was announced this week that a new Synod Moderator has been appointed for this synod. She is Revd Bridget Banks, who is currently a minister not only in this Southern Synod, but actually in Crawley, so she is well aware of our 'neck of the woods'. She will take up her post on 1st September.

We have taken the decision to suspend publication of the Messenger for a few months, until things get slightly more back to 'normal' (whatever that turns out to look like). Production and distribution would be very difficult in current circumstances, much of the normal content would be unavailable or irrelevant, and inevitably information would be out of date almost immediately in a world which keeps changing... I (and the elders in each church) will try very hard to keep everyone informed and up to date about what is happening, through phone calls, emails and letters like this.

There was a new explanation of the Ascension being shared this year - 'when Jesus began working from home'. Perhaps we'll come back to that in the service on Sunday!

May God Bless us all - whether we are gazing upwards at the blue heavens, or exhausted by work and worry here on earth.

Anne Lewitt

These letters and Bulletins, with some details removed for confidentiality, are now being added to our church websites so that they are more easily and widely accessible.