

Reflections and Prayers: Tuesday after Emmaus

This is the 5th of a series of weekly Reflections and Prayers being offered to the Norley Methodist Church congregation and to friends in many places worldwide. They are sourced from a variety of people. You are invited to use them for personal reflection and to share and retain them as you wish.



'Jesus himself came up and walked along with them' Luke 24: 15 (NIV)

Maybe the joy of Eastertide has passed you by in these days of 'lockdown' and 'self-isolation'. During this strange time emotions will range from confusion through to fear. In this post Easter Day period we are made aware, through the Gospels of the emotional upheaval the disciples felt from Good Friday through to the days following the resurrection of Jesus. They also spent time behind locked doors.

The sense of isolation and loneliness that some people are experiencing, the uncertainties, the change in social behaviour. The not being able to hold those who are dear to us because they do not live with us. This enforced change in our relationships with family and friends is tough.

When I preached the last service at Darley Dale [pictured] before the lockdown, I mentioned how we need to look for God's Glory where we do not expect to find it.

I want to suggest in these unusual days that even in our limited movements, the short walk or the occasional visit to a shop or, as some are, in the confinement of our home, we are not alone. When Jesus joined the disciples on the road to Emmaus they did not realise it was him. In their fear and their grief they had shut out the possibility that he was with them. They were wrong! He would always be there for them and indeed for disciples through the ages.

These are difficult times, no doubt. However close we may come to questioning the presence of God in Jesus, when the tears of frustration, the fear of isolation begin to overwhelm us let us open our hearts and minds to the presence of Christ in our lives.

Break the bread at a meal-time and recall how those first disciples, bewildered and lost, disconsolately walking down a road wondering what the future held, realised that Jesus had been with them all the time!

Revd David Glasson, April 2020. David is a retired minister, married to Barbara (President of the Conference): their home is near Matlock, Derbyshire. You may have passed by Darley Dale Methodist Church driving on the A6 between Matlock and Bakewell.

Remembering the Methodist Diaconal Order

Introductory note (John Bell)

The designation 'deacon' means different things to different Churches. The British Methodist Church has two parallel Orders of Ministry and ordains ministers as either presbyters or deacons to serve in collaboration with each other and lay people. Deacon is not an intermediate step to becoming presbyter. Presbyters are ordained 'to celebrate the sacraments, to preach the word and to care for God's people': deacons are ordained 'to a ministry of service and pastoral care and seek to equip God's people for service in the world'. [Methodist Worship Book, Introduction to Ordination Services p 297]

Deacons are also members of a Religious Order – the Methodist Diaconal Order (MDO) – committed to observing 'rules of life', and they meet for their Convocation once a year: active deacons (there are 130 or so)

always attend and those retired (about 120) are invited and encouraged to do so. This is normally held at the Hayes Conference Centre (Swanwick) and would have taken place this week, **Tuesday** May 5th to Friday the 8th. This year, Convocation will (so I understand) go ahead in virtual mode though the deacons will sorely miss their face-to-face encounters. We wish them well and ask God's blessing upon them.

In order to mark the occasion and to remember the distinctive calling and ministry of Methodist deacons, I have invited Deacon Tim Coleman, appointed to Runcorn in the North Cheshire Circuit, to reflect on being a deacon at this time of national and local crisis.

Photo of the iconic road and railway bridges linking Runcorn with Widnes and the north bank of the River Mersey: the new Mersey Gateway road bridge is upstream.



Reflecting on my diaconal ministry in this time of national crisis

My retail chaplaincy role in the Runcorn Shopping City complex has been severely restricted and is limited to writing a blog and providing an online prayer wall. I have been able to 'chat' with some of the staff as I have met them around the area on my occasional excursions into the complex and this gives me some idea as to how the staff are coping. All I can really do is pray, so this is my chief work.

My work among the asylum seekers [of which Runcorn has many] is much the same; the difference here is that I work as part of a much larger team, so my role is primarily to stay in touch and pray.

My pastoral work in the local churches is a collaborative team effort with the pastoral visitors and my presbyteral colleague and consists of phoning around the congregation list and writing pastoral letters. And prayer.

One of the blessings of the crisis is the way that our circuit staff team are working closely together with circuit stewards and lay workers, enabled through the use of internet-based communications to work collaboratively to serve all the churches. The online presence of the circuit has multiplied massively giving it the capacity to reach a far wider community than the churches alone. It has been a privilege to participate in this collaborative work.

Personally, I feel somewhat buried by this crisis. I feel the confusion and sense of loss of those in the church and wider community, and the pressure to be busy trying to connect and serve is constant and there is no escape. My usual R&R [rest and recreation] activity is not open to me, so I feel trapped in the manse – my place of work. I find I am in the process of re-inventing – or rediscovering my call and my ministry. Almost as though I am waiting for a kind of resurrection.

The call of a deacon is to be with Jesus, and from there to be sent to serve as Christ among those to whom the deacon is sent. The ministry is therefore a way of **being** more than it is of doing – doing a particular work of one kind or another. The doing flows out of the being and the being is, in part, shaped by the doing. It's a bit like breathing. The inhale is the being, of drawing in of the spirit of God deep into you, the exhaling is the expression of that life of the spirit in service. God is already present and working in the community in which we serve, so it is inevitable that we encounter the Holy Spirit ahead of us, leading and guiding. But when you cannot leave your home, except for essential work or for your own needs, it interrupts that normal pattern, it disrupts and distorts the rhythm of ministry, and that can disorientate and it takes time to refocus and make adjustments. This disruption also triggers feelings of grief at the loss of so much normality and in this I find that I share the pain of the community around me.

It was in this grief that I began to find my feet in ministering in this crisis, as I drew on the Easter story: resurrection, Christ is with us. To say that I have worked out what this crisis has done for my ministry as a deacon would be premature as I won't know that until we are through it. But I get that sense that just as the

disciples waited in that upper room in self-isolation, unsure what was going to happen next or when, so we are in a similar place. What will the daybreak bring? Now that's something to pray about.

Deacon Tim Coleman, April 2020, Runcorn

A Prayer for Tuesday

Loving God please bless Tuesday.
It is neither the first nor the last
neither the beginning nor the end
neither the best nor the worst
as a day of week.
And bless all those ordinary people
who are middle aged
middle grade
middle class
or just fair to middling.
Thank you God for the Tuesday people,
who don't give grief
who don't give earache
who don't want to make a fuss
who just get on with the job.
May they know they are loved
and blessed beyond words
and remind me to let them know
(and to be thankful for Tuesdays).
Amen



*Tuesday people in the market at Agadir, Morocco
Photo by Joan Bell, October 2015*

Revd Dr Barbara Glasson

'Nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord' Romans 8: 39

Loving God, in this time of uncertainty and distress
keep us safe in the knowledge that you love us.
Sustain and support the anxious and fearful.
Lift up all who are brought low.
May those who suffer loss be comforted.
May those who are caring for the sick be kept safe.
Above all, help us all to remember that nothing can separate us from your love in Christ Jesus our Lord.
Amen.

Michael Gough, April 2020, Norley

Michael's prayer is an assuring reminder that despite the uncertainties, frustrations and grief which may immediately surround us (and on which David and Tim have reflected in different, personal ways), we are never separated from God's love in Jesus, our risen Lord. And do we sometimes catch a glimpse of it through those ordinary Tuesday people, wherever they are? Thanks be to God indeed.

Note and invitation to readers

I have gathered these reflections and prayers and they include some of my own material. If you wish to offer pieces for inclusion in future weeks, please send them to me at johnabell@supanet.com Each edition will be released on a Friday so that it can be distributed for Sunday and the following week. Many thanks, John