

28th July 2020

Dear Friends.

August is nearly here!

This is the month when the great adventures can happen! For over twenty years I shared leading a young people's canvas camp in the first week of the holidays. I can almost feel the season in my bones and the air we breathe. There is something marvellous about being out of doors. This August is a very different summer month from any that we have experienced before, but I hope you will have the opportunity to soak up some summer sunshine and have small adventures too.

In recognition of the season this pastoral letter will be published every two weeks instead of every week although we will still be sending an order of worship with a message every week. In September I hope that the pastoral letter will become a monthly letter and that with it will be news and notices that people want to share. Not quite a church magazine but something akin to that.

Our plans for August have also changed in the light of the feedback the deacons have had received about when people are likely to return to New North Road on a Sunday. Therefore, we are going to continue with guided individual silent prayer on a Sunday, during August, from ten o'clock until eleven o'clock and with the Zoom gathering at 11.45. There will also be some special features such as focus on Jamaica on the 9th of August. We have been encouraged by the number of people who are coming but want to stress no one should return until they feel confident about this.

The idea of guided silent prayer is to create a more contemplative environment using silence, scripture and simple prayers that is different from our traditional Sunday worship. We are translating this into Farsi much more than we would usually do because there is time to do this at the moment, aware that the long absence of worship has been especially hard for these new Christians.

As you will know from listening to the news things continue to change and can change quite suddenly but it is still our intention to have a 'back to church' Sunday in September when we will return more usual services at half past ten. The children's

team will also be meeting to consider our provision for them but as you can imagine doing this in a spatially distanced way requires imagination and new ways of doing things. We are still on a learning curve.

A word about church meetings. It isn't possible for us to have a church meeting that would be open to everyone who would be there in ordinary times because it is too soon for many people to be confident about leaving home. The deacons have also thought about electronic meetings as an alternative but there is no provision for doing this in our governing document and we know many people could not access an electronic meeting. Therefore, we are being careful to follow the advice of the Baptist union and where we have made a decision that would usually pass through the church meeting, we are being careful to inform you. There is one such decision this month. We have agreed to send our accounts for 2019 to the charity commission and will ask the church to adopt these when we can meet. If you would like a paper or electronic copy of the accounts please let me, Gordon or Dave Carrins know. On your behalf I would like to express our great thanks to Dave for all his work as our acting treasurer.

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Last week's pastoral letter focussed on trees. This week I want to focus on streams.

In Judges 1 vs 12 you can read the story of Acsah. We know little about her, but she wasn't backward about coming forward with her father Caleb. When her father makes of her a prize for the man who captures a place called Kiriath Sepher he also gifts her some land in the Negev, a desert region. In Hebrew, the language of Judges what happens next is ambiguous. Acsah visits her father and we are told she 'slides' off the donkey that she was seated on. In some translations this is interpreted as quite a rude or provocative gesture that startles her father. Of course we don't know, but it doesn't sound as if Acsah was best pleased by her Father's gift and the reason isn't hard to fathom; if the land was to have any value they needed to water and so she asked him for springs. Her cheek is rewarded, and he gives her both the higher and lower springs.

Water is essential to all life. In John 4 Jesus tells the woman he meets at the well that whoever drinks the water he gives will never be thirsty for the water he gives will become a spring within them, welling up to eternal life.

Although I have never experienced real thirst, I have certainly been thirsty. I have also been dehydrated. One of my experiences on that canvas camp I was telling you about was seeing young people collapse, complaining of exhaustion and unable to move or lift their limbs. When I asked them when they had last drunk any water, they would often retort that they were not thirsty. Even so I would push a bottle under their nose and insist they drank. Within twenty minutes their transformation was remarkable. Their heads cleared, their bodies felt young again and they smiled! They had been dehydrated and they hadn't known it.

We all need water. Water is essential. We have the privilege of living in a country where clean running water is nearly always available in our taps but in many countries this isn't so and charities like water aid make a critical difference in some overseas countries by enabling people to sink wells for their communities. To gift people clean running water is to gift them life.

In Isaiah 58 the prophet describes God's promise that he will be there when we call on him if we are fasting in a biblical way. Fasting in the sense of giving up food was a common spiritual practice but in Isaiah we read 'the kind of fasting I require is to lose the bonds of injustice, to let the oppressed go free To share your food with the hungry and welcome the homeless. When we do that God says, 'here I am' Vs 6 -9. One of the promises that follows this is the God will guide us and meet us in our need even though we are parched for we will be like a well-watered garden, like a spring of water that never fails. Vs 11. In Isaiah 58 vs 12 it says 'you will be called the repairer of the breach, the restorer of streets to live in.' As we seek to rebuild and restore our lives and the lives of our neighbours I hope that whatever we do will be life giving and energising, so that our lives and the life of our church at New North Road will be like a well-watered garden where streams of living water flow.

I have begun visiting people in their gardens, well ventilated living rooms and their doorsteps. Do call me and invite me to visit if you would like. I'm also open to invitations to go for a walk about your local park. You can contact me on 07852 490034 and my email is rmijanes@aol.com.

Your friend and pastor

Mark

