

7<sup>th</sup> June 2021

Dear Friends

A week or so ago Trish and I took some of our family up Castle Hill to 'blow the cobwebs away' The view from up there never loses the 'wow' factor and its quite remarkable how far you can see. With good eyesight or pair of binoculars you can identify nearly all of the buildings for which Huddersfield is famous, many of its neighbourhoods and the villages in its orbit. I don't know if it's the best view in Yorkshire but it's surely a competitor and it's one of the landmarks that appears every night on the BBC's local news programme.

Huddersfield is a town. That might seem a statement of the obvious but there are cities that are smaller than Huddersfield and I am glad that Huddersfield has resisted the temptation to seek city status. Some years ago, the BBC screened a series about Towns by my favourite geographer Nicholas Crane who also presented the BBC series Coast and is well known for appearing with his umbrella. The series included very different Towns and one episode was all about Huddersfield. He introduced the series by explaining that he believed towns are the face of the future.

I think I would agree. One of the things we love about living in Huddersfield is that it has an urban quality but you are always in sight of the hills, green spaces are never far away and open country is nearby. It isn't too small and it's not too big either. Nicholas Crane also presented a series called Map Man and I like that because it could easily be a description of me but as I discovered maps of Huddersfield can be deceptive, especially the A to Z because there are no contours! Huddersfield and hills go together but you are in for a shock if you trusted the A to Z because there are only two dimensions on this map and one of the wonders of Huddersfield is the unexpected views created by coming around a corner and seeing the place from a new angle because of the hills and the valleys.

Of course, Huddersfield has changed dramatically over the years and many of you will be able to name the changes because you have lived through them. Some changes are good and welcome including the growth of the university and the renewal of Greenhead Park. Some surely caused upheaval and confusion at the time but are taken for granted now such as the inner ring road and some people will regret. While we were in the process of moving the Marks and Spencer in the centre of the town closed and the great Coop building stands as a reminder of the days when people from other places, including Bradford would take a day to go shopping in Huddersfield.

Another thing that has changed are the number of churches in the town. At New North Road we can celebrate the vision and imagination of Birkby Baptist Church and its members who have contributed so much to our life when the time came for it to

close. While many historical church buildings remain open as places of worship, others stand as a reminder that Churches can be left behind by changes, they fail to anticipate. Years ago a dear friend of mine from Northern Baptist College began her first pastorate up at Primrose Hill where the church building has become a very smart student Hostel and that is only one of many that have changed hands as people's lifestyles and expectations have changed. Yet there are new churches too, some of which like the Elim Church have moved to a new building and are good friends to New North Road. Others such as Cathedral House are so big, they seem to exist in their own universe and I confess it's hard not see a church of that kind as a competitor rather than a partner in the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Its encouraging that there are good churches in the centre of our town for in many places, depopulation, road closures and the search for more spacious and modern buildings have led Baptist Churches to abandon their town Centres. Fifty years ago, New North Road Baptist Church made the opposite choice and remained in the centre of the Town when great change was occurring that could have led to a different choice. Being in the centre of the town has real advantages but it also presents challenges and one of the things that I was invited to do was to help us renew our vision of what it is to be a town centre church.

One of the phrases that could help describe who we are appears on the cards I send when we are praying for someone. This describes New North Road Baptist Church as church with a heart for people in the heart of Huddersfield.

Being a town centre church does require us to offer our building as a venue for our neighbours to use, we want it to be a popular place people respect and its appropriate for us to offer it for civic events such as the electoral hustings we hosted with all the candidates at the last election. We are a place of welcome for vulnerable people and the work of Reach with refugees is a sign of compassion and a concern for justice. We have recently been awarded recognition as a place that can welcomes schools when children want to visit as part of their RE syllabus. All of these things indicate a desire to be hospitable and welcoming, to be at the heart of things and at the heart of it all is a worshipping community that is vibrant and full of hope.

Our sixth prayer goal this year invites us to pray that 'That we will experience a renewed sense of who we are called to be as a town centre church and a renewed confidence in our vision, with courage to pursue it.' As we emerge from lockdown, I hope you will share with me in making that prayer goal your own.

Your friend and pastor.

Mark