

Winter 2015-16

Dear Brothers and Sisters

If I have not seen you – a belated merry Christmas and happy new Year! Also a big thank you for your cards and words of encouragement.

Despite the wet and the dark it seems to me that our churches are often at their most vibrant during this season. It was a joy to participate in so many special events such as the Ordnance Road Christmas Fayre, the Ponders End 'Unit in Diversity Concert' or the Goffs Oak 'Carols by Torchlight' in aid of Action for Children. AND of course our many special services with nativity scenes, X Factor drama's, musicians and choirs. 'I love Christmas', one of my stewards said to me, 'visitors, family, friends all experiencing the Jesus story' often in ways they don't expect. Personally I love the music, the hymns and the descants of the season. It was a particular delight to have a small choir at Ordnance Road for the first time in many years.

In fact Methodism is known for an informality of being and worship that makes faith real and I am convinced that whenever we take our faith out into the world or invite people into our Churches they are often surprised to find how relevant it is and how much God speaks to them.

It seems to me, even in our secular world, that people accept that none of us are perfect, we are all a bit broken. We know that only the Christian faith, through Jesus, deals directly and completely with our brokenness. God acts on our behalf - because we can do nothing about it ourselves other than to have faith as we cast ourselves on God's mercy.

So, whether it has been through services, events, seeing friends, hospital visits or even, sadly, winter funerals – God – Immanuel – affirms God's presence with us in all parts of our lives.

Meanwhile, the other day, a friend from another Church asked me what the secret was to helping churches grow. I said there was no secret – all we have done is invite people along, welcome them warmly and share what Jesus means to us. Across all three churches new people have come. My conclusion is simple – God is good and we must continue to trust in his grace.

Finally, as we have journeyed through Advent and Christmas the underlying theme has been how we

respond to Christ coming into our lives. In both Covenant and Epiphany I have taken this further and asked the question; 'what risks are we prepared to take to meet with and follow Christ?'

A number of you asked me to provide the text of a Poem I quoted by William Ward on this subject...



To laugh is to risk appearing the fool,
To weep is to risk being called sentimental.
To reach out to another is to risk involvement.
To expose feelings is to risk showing your true self.
To place your ideas and your dreams before the crowd
is to risk being called naive.
To love is to risk not being loved in return.
To live is to risk dying - to hope is to risk despair,
To try is to risk failure.

But risks must be taken,
because the greatest risk in life
is to risk nothing.
The person who risks nothing,
does nothing, has nothing, is nothing,
and becomes nothing.
They may avoid suffering and sorrow,
but simply cannot learn,
feel, change, grow or love.
Chained by certitude, they are a slave;
They have forfeited their freedom.
Only the person who risks is truly free.

In Matthew 14 Jesus captures this as he calls to Peter telling him to take heart and to not be afraid:
²⁹ He said, "Come." So Peter got out of the boat and walked on the water and came to Jesus.

Indeed - if we want to walk on water, we have to first get out of the boat! I wonder where God will take us in this new year if we continue to think and pray this way....

May you know God's presence and step out with faith into this new-year. God bless you.

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