

**Christ suffered for sin once for all,
the righteous for the unrighteous,
in order to bring you to God.**



Ripon & Lower Dales Methodist Circuit
With God in the City, Towns, Villages and rural areas

Dear friends,

This Lent and Eastertide I am particularly thankful for being able to get out and about around the circuit. Whilst I will be journeying towards ascension and celebrating Pentecost during my Sabbatical, I have appreciated sharing with the church family for various times of worship, prayer, and devotion. Being able to gather on site in church buildings to break bread or walking with Rosie the donkey along the road on Palm Sunday as been tremendously inspiring. Conversations that I have shared usually included a personal reflection that is my first year of being able to journey Lent and celebrate Easter gathered on site. I have experienced a strange feeling of familiar and new at the same time, but immensely thankful to God for the great Christian witness I have seen. I have been encouraged by the emergence of ecumenical relationships beginning to be engaged once more as we feel better placed to have larger gatherings for worship. Furthermore, now that schools can welcome the church back, to lead collective worship and creative worship with J.A.M (Jesus and Me) we are back serving together. The above examples and others have given me plenty to be thankful for, ever aware of God present and active.

God is active and we are all invited to join in. It is great to be getting back to gathering together again but let's not go backwards, rather let's strive to let go of the 'used to' and 'we've always' past in pursuit of God who offers newness of life. Let's take courage to step out and step forward with God, which is being put into practice by the members at Finghall, inspired and guided by the Holy Spirit. Openness to God does not mean we will not do something again, afresh, but it does mean we are open to ensuring we have discerned how God is leading. Children learn the Green Cross Code, 'Think; Stop; Look and listen; Wait; Look and listen again; Arrive alive.' It has developed since I first learnt this, but we are to arrive alive at the decisions we make. What I mean by this is that we are to be a church that is alive in Christ, a Risen church. We ought to think about what we do; how we love God and how we serve our communities. We ought to think about why we do it too.

We need to stop. Stop being too hard on ourselves, individually and as a church family. Instead let us hear the words of Jesus saying; ²⁸ 'Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. ²⁹ Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. ³⁰ For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.' We sometimes need to stop something to enable something else to happen. Which means we should look and listen to what God is showing us and speaking to us today. May we be minded to wait-upon the Lord in prayer and let's remember to look and listen again. We are alive because we are the body of Christ, and we know our Redeemer lives. Whilst it might seem childish to quote the Green Cross Code, we are called children of God and it reminds us to seek the One who is greater than anything we may anticipate as problems in the life of the church. If we belong to God, we must ceaselessly seek the Kingdom of God and pray without ceasing. As a faithful Christian lady once said to me; 'Let go and let God.' For as we read in 1 Corinthians; 'For the foolishness of God is wiser than human wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than human strength.'

Without going down a theological path of asking the question does God have any foolishness or weakness. We can deduce that even if God did it is still wiser and stronger than human wisdom and strength. This does not deny us using wisdom or strength in how we love and serve the Lord. Though I risk sounding like a broken record, it's a risk worth taking because I want to thank each person across the circuit who serves the Lord. Whether it is washing up after refreshments; welcoming people on the door with a smile and a hymn book, or exercising a church appointed role as a steward or local preacher. I am not going to list everyone here because we want to help the environment and the list really does go on. If you serve in the life of the church, however great or small it might you might perceive it, please know it is appreciated and gives into life of the Church. Thank you everyone for being you, giving what you give and doing what you do with a loving servant heart.

We had an encouraging Circuit meeting last month and amongst the decisions made by the managing trustees, were two appointments. Maureen Scollay has been appointed Senior Circuit Steward to serve for an interim period during this her final year. Our heartfelt thanks to Maureen for taking up this position and with our prayers for Maureen, may we give her our support. The second appointment was made to appoint Steve Wild, a member at Bishop Monkton to the position of circuit steward for the Connexional year 2022/23. I am delighted to be welcoming Steve to the circuit stewards' team and look forward to serving together in the future. Please let us all assure our circuit stewards of our prayer support to the work they carry out on behalf of the circuit.

Margaret Smith recently shared with me her encouraging news that Oncologist is very pleased with the results so far. That with the combination of current treatment and surgery in May, the prognosis looks good. I know we are all sending our love to Margaret and will continue to hold her in prayer as she continues through her cancer treatment. Margaret has such courage and remains true to the inspirational person we know and love.

As you are aware, when we welcome Revd. Ian Pruden back from his Sabbatical, I venture forward into mine. Ian is going to be re-entering his circuit ministry as Acting Superintendent and I am thankful too Ian for taking on this position in my absence. I have full confidence in Ian, knowing you are in both safe and pastorally loving hands. I know a number of people have enjoyed following Ian's blog and I am sure he will have lots to share upon his return. Thanks too to all those who have given extra of themselves during the last three months and for all those who have offered to go even more extra miles over the next three months. I appreciate everyone's generosity and care.

Hopefully, you have received the letters Nigel and I circulated, so I will keep this brief. We have recently received the news that God who calls us to expect the unexpected, is leading the church in an unexpected but exciting way. Revd. Deacon Nigel Perrott is being moved into another circuit by the Methodist Diaconal Order. Our sadness at saying farewell to Nigel is only matched by our love and support for Nigel moving into an appointment that is so fitting to his gifts and skills. Please join me in holding Nigel and Jane in prayer at this considerable time of change. May they have a great and blessed time in their remaining months here in the Ripon and Lower Dales area.

Finally, thank you for all the churches around the circuit for continuing to open your doors to those in need and especially more recently for prayer for the people of Ukraine. This simple act of making the spaces we have to offer available for the local communities to come and sit with God awhile is something I hope we would continue this for the foreseeable future. We pray the horrors taken place would cease but we are under no delusion that it is going to take a great deal of support for Ukraine to heal from what has happened to them. They will certainly need continued prayer support alongside whatever other ways we might be able to help. I am also aware that sometimes when a situation moves off our news streams it can become forgotten. It was in the not too distant past that the horrendous situation in Afghanistan filled our screens as well as other situations of people in need in the world. We can play our part by praying for justice and peace with open doors.

I pray that we are all met by the transformational love of God as we continue to follow Jesus to the foot of the cross through to celebrating His glorious resurrection and victory over sin and death. The disciples were met by Our Risen Lord, Jesus Christ, in a garden, on the road, behind a lock door and on the beach. May Jesus meet you wherever you are and know His peace in your heart. It leaves me to conclude by saying I hope you have a happy and blessed Eastertide.

Happy Easter!

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Gareth". The script is fluid and cursive, with a large initial 'G'.

Revd. Gareth Baron
Superintendent Minister
Ripon & Lower Dales Methodist Circuit