

## Pastoral Letter – East Anglia District

Chair of the District - Revd. Julian M. Pursehouse

13:05:2020

Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

It continues to be a great blessing for me to communicate in this way and to remain connected to you the Methodist people across the East Anglia District. From the beginning of this great crisis I have felt compelled to exercise my care for you by addressing you with a word of encouragement each week.

This last week saw the crossing of a grim threshold when we learnt that the number of fatalities from COVID – 19 reached over 30,000. At the beginning of the pandemic the Chief Medical Officer intimated that a figure less than 20,000 would be a good result for the United Kingdom; so this is a truly awful point to reach. Over the next month or so this figure is likely to rise further and we face the sobering prospect of someone deciding what a ‘politically’ acceptable daily death toll will be as the conditions of lockdown are relaxed by degrees! Imagine my surprise when in the midst of this; another newspaper article reminded us that during the eight weeks of lockdown some 70,000 new babies were delivered in hospitals and homes across the UK. Just at a time when we are being reminded on a daily basis of our human mortality we are also reminded that we are living in the midst of the possibility and miracle of new life! Of course these are strange times in which to begin the journey of life – they are referred to as the COVID babies; the infants that have *not* been lovingly held by doting Grandparents but instead have been held in the grey frame of a Zoom Call in virtual space. They will not be visiting the local Parent and Baby group any time soon. However I was thankful to be reminded of the gift of life for it momentarily gave sharp relief in these troubling times and helped to rebalance my vision of the world.

As people of faith we should be accustomed to this thought; that in the midst of death there is the possibility of life for at the heart of the Gospel is the good news of Christ crucified and risen. The Apostle Paul frequently uses the image of being *in Christ* as an analogy of Christian discipleship and that to share in fellowship with Christ is to share in the dying and rising of Christ. In the Gospel lectionary reading for last Sunday (John 14:1-14) Christ offers comfort and assurance to his disciples by reminding them that through fellowship with him they have a sharing in the spacious canopy of God’s eternal love. Christ is the way, the truth and the life for he has passed through death into the glory of God’s new life – he discloses the means by which we might be enfolded in the truth of God’s love and brought to the peace of his eternal rest. This is a message for the living and the dying; to keep company and abide in Christ is to be enfolded in the love of God both in life and death.

I want to close with some beautiful words from the English mystic Julian of Norwich: someone who was familiar with suffering but also someone who knew the profound reality of God’s presence;

***‘I saw that for us God is everything that is good and comforting and helpful. He is our clothing, wrapping and enveloping us for love, embracing us and guiding us in all things, hanging about us in tender love, so that he can never leave us. And so in this vision, as I understand it, I saw truly that he is everything that is good for us.’***

I pray that you might know the goodness of God today,

With Peace and Blessing, Julian