

Hello Everyone!

**7 'Be strong and very courageous. Be careful to obey all the law my servant Moses gave you; do not turn from it to the right or to the left, that you may be successful wherever you go. 8 Keep this Book of the Law always on your lips; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful. 9 Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go' (Joshua 1:7-9).**

My Dad loved these verses. I recall him preaching on them at New Year – a time when we all think about New Year's resolutions and change. A brief summary of the context might help us gain greater understanding. God's great promise to Abraham, the man of faith, was that he would have an uncountable number of offspring, that these children would have a land of their own and that through them all the nations of the earth would be blessed. The story unfolds through Isaac, Jacob and Joseph. During the life of Joseph there was a time of famine and the children of Israel needed to go to Egypt for food. Sadly, the Israelites drifted into a period of slavery (not so much like the slavery of the American and Caribbean sugar plantations but more like the political and economic oppression suffered by people in Ireland in the nineteenth century). Fear of revolution caused the Egyptian Pharaoh to take even more oppressive measures against the Hebrew-speaking Israelites. Despite persecution, including the killing of infants, the baby Moses was saved and in time grew to be the leader of the Israelites. Through the Passover, the ritual slaughter of lambs and the sprinkling of the blood on the doorframe of the Israelite homes, the Israelite people were delivered from their captivity and began a journey through the wilderness to Canaan, the Promised Land. This is a journey that should take about 11 days. At the oasis of Kadesh Barnea, the Israelites sent 12 spies to look at Canaan who reported that it was as beautiful and fertile as God had said it would be but that it was already occupied by pagan Canaanite tribes. The 12 spies took a vote as to whether to seek to enter the land and conquer it. By 10 votes to two, they decided not to trust in God's promise and condemned themselves to 40 years' wandering in the wilderness. Through these years, Moses continued to lead the wayward people, receiving the 10 Commandments. However, in time, Moses died leaving Joshua, under God, to lead the people.

Like so many Scripture passages, we like the positive bits: 'Be strong and very courageous. ... Then you will be prosperous and successful. Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go' (Joshua 1:7a, 9). The trouble with that quotation is that it omits the latter part of verse 7 and the whole of verse 8: 'Be careful to obey all the law my servant Moses gave you; do not turn from it to the right or to the left, that you may be successful wherever you go. Keep this Book of the Law always on your lips; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it.' In short, if we leave the teaching of the Bible out of any plans for the future, we cannot claim Biblical promises.

On Monday 27 July, it will be 18 weeks (more than four months) since the Prime Minister announced the lockdown. I can't help thinking that there are parallels with the wilderness but we are trusting that the time will come when we are ready to return to meeting together. In July, with the help of two colleagues, a document 'Emerging from Lockdown' was circulated. If you belong to our church community but for some reason have not received it please contact the circuit office. I hope this document will provide an initial basis for conversation in our church communities and church councils. However, to be clear, I am not looking to play a major part in this conversation. Feedback should be communicated to the church stewards or church council secretary – but please be careful to keep your feedback positive, thinking about things you are 'for' rather than things you are 'against'. It's so easy to have a knee-jerk reaction against the prospect of change but we have to

remember the place to which our present arrangements have brought us. Each church needs to own its vision for the future.

#### **Re-opening our buildings after the lockdown**

While many people are keen to get back into church for services, at the moment we are not permitted to have services that include singing or music from a pipe organ in churches that have one. For all uses, the decision to re-open the building is the responsibility of the church council which can apply to the circuit for authorisation to re-open. A risk assessment and a church council decision confirming that the church has put all the necessary arrangements in place has to be sent to the circuit office. The church council will need to appoint a responsible person to check that all the requirements are met – it's fair to say that at the moment these are quite considerable – and to present a report to the church council. This will include things like cleaning and legionella flushing. We are also recommending that anyone wanting to attend any service or meeting on Methodist premises completes the self-assessment check provided by the *British Medical Association*. At the moment, the recommendation is that people who score 6 or more in the self-assessment (which includes everyone over 80) should continue to participate in the life of the church from home.

Normally, at this time of year, I am wishing people well for their holidays. Like most people, we are not planning to go away this summer. How thankful we are then for the beautiful part of the world in which we live! I hope that you can enjoy the seaside and the countryside around us – let's hope that we can have some bright, sunny days – with some soft overnight rain sometimes to keep gardeners and farmers happy.

God bless

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "John".

**John Haley**  
**Minister**