

Hello everyone

We've been celebrating in the manse this week. Celebrating because not just one but two liquorice seeds have now germinated.

Norma and I were so excited that we gathered in the kitchen and I was instructed to go out around the village and return with more potting compost. It was time to extend the liquorice good news and pot up all the remaining three seeds.

So off I went with a feeling this was not just a momentous time in my gardening history but that I was following in the footsteps of others.

When I returned I told Norma all that had happened and we sat down for a cup of coffee and a biscuit.

Then it hit me.

We had been living, on a much more trivial level, a similar story to those first disciples who had gone out as instructed by Jesus to tell the good news the kingdom of God is near to the towns and villages around them.

While my trip had a similar feel, I wasn't quite as brave as those disciples. I didn't knock on doors or even whisper in the shop that I had now got two liquorice plants and the marvellous news is that you, with patience, can have them too.

Yet we are the people who Jesus now relies on to take his big message out into the community.

After hearing the twelve being sent out, one person said does that mean Jesus now gets a holiday.

You don't think of Jesus packing his case, picking up his sun tan lotion and going off on holiday do you? Or maybe you do? He is the hard-working Messiah who gave his all for us.

But Matthew makes it clear that Jesus doesn't get a holiday. When he had finished instructing the disciples, he went on to teach and proclaim the message.

When the disciples return and Mark tells us that they gathered around Jesus and told him what they had done.

They seem excited that they are back in familiar circumstances and then Jesus urges them to take some rest.

Over the last few months during what has been called rather inelegantly lock down, there has been much talk in the church about going out and doing things differently. This has meant usually going out to people online through websites, Facebook and You tube.

And while we all look forward to returning to our church buildings and church life in full, one look at the guidelines for re-opening church buildings makes it very clear that all our work putting church online will continue for many months yet and in addition there will be extra cleaning costs associated with re-opening church buildings. Church hasn't stopped, but it is happening differently.

We've known all our lives that we are treading in the disciple's footsteps as we offer worship and practical services to all in need.

But maybe at the moment we feel even more close to those first disciples

Jesus summoned his disciples and gave them authority. Go and proclaim the good news, he said. This is not a holiday for you or for me, Go, tell those you meet the kingdom of God has come near and help them out.

Think about it, that is what we have been doing online. The feedback shows that what we offer through website and Facebook is reaching and being viewed by far more people than we see in the church building on Sunday and furthermore, people are as likely to watch and listen on Friday as they are on Sunday.

What are we to make of that?

But while we enjoy the freedom of online worship, we do miss the sense of a community gathered and focused on God.

We are very used to saying the church is the people, but we mean that the church is the people gathered and to do that we need a space where two or three can gather.

Search the New Testament and you will not find solitary Christians worshipping. Whatever society today tells us, worship and prayer is not a solitary or private occupation.

Yes, private prayer happens at home, but we gather to worship God in our buildings or community spaces. The guidelines recognise the importance of this aspect of church.

When they say

The reality of church is that our church buildings provide sense of place for many to express their faith, experience worship and grow in relationships. We do miss our buildings.

And that importance is recognised at the start of a church service.

Three little words that are so important. They come after the scripture sentence each week and mark the formal start of worship.

Let us worship God.

They are so important liturgically, that they have a name. The Call to worship.

Like the disciples, Jesus sends us out with a message. What will ours look like as we go out to re-open our church buildings?

It is likely we will embrace both worship in the buildings and online services.

But whichever way we go, it will be an exciting, possibly anxious and maybe even a tiring time.

We will be excited that we can gather together around Jesus like those first disciples and tell him all that we have done and taught

And then hear him say

Relax, come rest awhile.

For many had been coming and going and they had no leisure even to eat.

But those words have a wider appeal than just the church. ~Think about how many in our community:

Teachers

Health workers

Shop workers

farmers

People manufacturing food

have been working very hard to deliver our needs.

Jesus will say to us don't overstretch yourselves

He is in all our lives asking us to gather round him by seeing him in everyone we meet.

We don't just meet Jesus in a book, but Jesus, our living saviour, shines from everyone we meet./

Maybe as we work in the footsteps of the original twelve, we can re-purpose the words from AA Milne's dedication in Winnie the Pooh.

Hand in hand we come

The disciples and I

To lay this book in your lap

Say your surprised?

Say you like it?

Say it is just what you wanted?

Because it's yours-

Because we love you.

Because Jesus will speak to you from it.

Peace be with you, Amen.