

# Mike's message .....

## Membership and Confirmation

If you're reading this you are part of our valued family here at The Cotteridge Church?

But are you a church member?

Maybe you're not certain. Maybe you don't know what I'm talking about. Maybe you didn't think being a member was anything different to attending on a Sunday or during the week.



The Cotteridge Church operates a Membership List. If you attend on Sunday, or are part of our church life during the week in any way, then you belong here, you are part of our family. Becoming a member is the next important step on the journey. Only members can help out, or have a say, in certain aspects of church life. I would very much like you to become a member if you aren't already. Stop me and talk to me about it.

The Cotteridge Church offers you the chance to make this step of commitment by being 'confirmed' and 'received into membership'. This means that there is a service in which you make promises - these are the same promises that are made when someone is baptised. **That service will be on Sunday 1st March at 10.30pm** when the Bishop of Birmingham will be joining us. Here at The Cotteridge Church when you become a member you automatically become a member of The Methodist Church, The United Reformed Church and The Church of England. Three-for-One! Once you are a member you keep your membership of those churches, whichever congregation you become part of if you move in future.

I need to know who is interested in making this step of faith as soon as possible. Please let me know in person or by email at [mike.claridge@thecotteridgechurch.org.uk](mailto:mike.claridge@thecotteridgechurch.org.uk)

These are the components of membership. A church member will promise to:

**Worship** within the local church, including regular sharing in Holy Communion, and through personal prayer

**Learning and Caring**, through Bible study and meeting for fellowship, so that I may grow in faith and support others in their discipleship

**Service**, by being a good neighbour in the community, challenging injustice and using my resources to support the Church in its mission in the world

**Evangelism**, through working out my faith in daily life and sharing Christ with others.

By the way, if you have been a church member in another church then we can add you to the membership list anyway. Again, let me know. Also if you are uncertain as to whether you are a member already or not, ask me.

# Mike's message .....

## A Meditation for Lent and Easter

Some years ago I wrote the following meditation. The character of Simon of Cyrene is fascinating. I offer it to you as part of your Lent and Easter devotions.

### ***Simon of Cyrene - A face in the crowd***

A crowd in a market place.

Why are they here? That sea of faces;  
looking, listening, wondering.

Some are there on purpose - they knew it was happening.  
Some are passing by - they're wondering what is going on.

What can they see?

A man, bloodied and bruised by a night of torture, weighed down by a cross of wood.  
Barely able to see through eyes near blinded by blood and tears.  
But he can see. Just! And what can he see, in that crowd?

He sees a face. One face amidst a sea of faces. His eyes meet those of another.  
It's just a glance. But it's noticed.

Simon was his name. A migrant from Libya, the city of Cyrene. A long way from home.  
An outsider amidst the crowd. Feared by some. But in that glance there was love,  
amazing love.

Jesus fell. Weakened, by exhaustion he might not make it to the place of execution  
They wanted a spectacle to entertain the crowd.  
Someone else must carry that Cross, for a while. He'd do!

The soldiers dragged Simon from the crowd. He'd carry the Cross.

"Take up the cross and follow him" someone jeered. Many laughed.

Simon carried Jesus' burden but a short distance.  
But Jesus carried Simon's burden further - even to death itself.

He carries my burden too, and yours. Our guilt, our lies, our betrayal, our hatreds.  
These are the burdens that Jesus carries to the cross.

For Simon of Cyrene, for me and for you.

Our burdens are transformed on the Cross  
where love is stronger even than death itself.

For Christ is Risen from the dead! Alleluia!



*By Mike Claridge*

# Mike's message . . . .

*Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts. (Acts 2 .46)*

I was reflecting over Easter about empty church buildings and the empty tomb. It then occurred to me that the Risen Christ didn't appear in the Jerusalem temple, it would have put the wind up a few Sadducees if he had, or a synagogue. Instead he appeared in a garden, in the open countryside, on a beach and in a room where people were shut in. Who did he appear to? Mary Magdalene, in the isolation of bereavement. Frightened individuals who'd locked themselves away because of the threat of harm and death that they believed stalked outside. A couple walking in the countryside who later recognise him in the context of an ordinary meal. A group at a beach barbecue (not recommended in the current situation as I write) where the participants were confused, frightened, and full of unresolved guilt and failure.

As the followers of Jesus emerged as a distinctive group, the things that were central to their emerging traditions were carried out in ordinary homes; breaking bread, prayers, fellowship, and providing for the needy. A 'holy place' was still important - as the verse from Acts (above) confirms - but it wasn't central to their living of Christ's teaching. Later on some of those ordinary homes become designated worship venues, the first churches. The Christian Church was evolving fast.

We encounter the Risen Christ in a specific way when we're gathered together as *The Church* - usually in our *church building* (the two terms are distinct). But the Risen Christ is also fully present in the pastoral phone call, the food parcel, and even the online meeting! He's in scripture, and also in online teaching and nurture. He's in the daily work of the NHS, of care homes, day centres and places of fellowship.

Christ's presence in Holy Communion has been a challenge for many in the context of lock-down. Some denominations encourage participants to have bread and wine present in front of their computer screens or phones, and view that as an act of Holy Communion. Other denominations have expressly stated that ministers should not do this. We have the full range of opinions across our three denominations, which poses quite a dilemma in ecumenical contexts.

But Jesus shared many, many more meals with his followers than that one Passover that Christians regard as the institution of Holy Communion. The Risen Christ can be present in meals shared in contexts such as the Methodist tradition of The Love Feast, as some of us shared online in the Birmingham District's worship on Easter Day. In the breaking of bread (or cake) and sharing of wine (or water) Christ is can indeed be truly present. Alleluia! Christ is Risen! He is Risen indeed! Alleluia.



# Mike's message .....

## Lock Down has been hard!

It's still hard for many. Last time I wrote for Roundabout it was in the early days of lock down. Three months on it seems like another world.

Lengthy periods of separation from those we love has been difficult. People have had times of illness - non-Covid related - and had to attend hospital and out-patients unaccompanied. For some heartbreak has been harder as loved ones, including church members, have died alone.



Lock down is being eased. Shops are opening. Churches can, if they wish, open for private prayer. There will be a time to return for worship although some churches have decided with good reason not to reopen until September.

Everyone is walking on a journey that is unknown. We all make decisions of what to do, how to try and contribute to wellbeing of others. Sometimes we'll get that right, sometimes we'll get that wrong. There will always be some who think that we're doing the wrong things, or not doing the things we should. We need to cut some slack and accept that people are trying as hard as they can - even when we disagree.

This is very important as we move into the next stage. When worship and other aspects of church life return they will be very different. Worship will be a different style. Holy Communion may have to wait for a while. Singing may not be part of worship at first. Services may be at different times and shorter.

There will be a need to give and take. On arrival for worship people will be told where to sit, go immediately to those seats and leave immediately after worship. It sounds cold and clinical. But there will be a welcome and the presence of each and every person will be treasured and valued by others and by God.

During lock down we've maintained one of the largest on-line resource sites I've seen. We haven't used much 'live' content - other churches have - but we've run five courses and, every week, posted bible study notes, readings, worship sheets, and links to worship (recorded and live). I've prepared, recorded and broadcast a weekly video reflection. We've emailed out (thank you Peter Childs) a weekly bulletin and the notice sheet to everyone whose emails we know. On the website and bulletin we've given details of phone lines and tv worship schedules to pass on to those not online.

During lock down we've valued our pastoral links system and I've phoned members when a call has been needed. I've phoned people on the membership list 'at random' too. We've maintained support for B30 Foodbank and we've run Saplings Story Time and Messy Church at Home live on Facebook. The BB have used their own online resources, and the Day Centre has maintained contact with its members.

Thank you to everyone for all that you have done, and continue to do.

# Mike's message .....

## Harvest!

September is upon us and with it comes the season for Harvest Festivals. At Cotteridge we have 4th October pencilled in, so we'll see what happens.

There's no set date for Harvest Festival. That's logical, as Harvest time as an agricultural event varies depending on where you are in the country.

Originally Harvest Festival would have been spontaneous, as soon as the final crops were gathered in, and that would depend on the weather.

I say 'originally' but Harvest Festival is a surprisingly modern invention. It was only in the mid-19th Century that the celebration started being held in church buildings.

Prior to that each farm or family would have had a Harvest Home celebration.

Some in rural communities still do. But doesn't mean that there wasn't a thanksgiving in the church's life for the fruits of creation. There was a much older festival known as Lammas Day, at the beginning of August, when a loaf made from the first wheat of the harvest was used as the Communion bread. The origins of Lammas Day seem to stretch back to the reign of King Alfred the Great (849 - 899), who, although he founded many churches and monastic foundations, is chiefly remembered for overcooking some of the harvest produce!

Elsewhere in the world Harvest Festivals are celebrated according to local traditions. In Judaism Pentecost (which later gave its name to a Christian festival too) is a Harvest Festival. In Jesus' day the first fruits of corn were presented in the Temple (Deuteronomy 16 .9). It was held fifty days after Passover, hence its name. Other faiths have their Harvest Festivals too. Within Christianity there is a wide spread of tradition. Perhaps it is the USA that harvest has its biggest celebration. 'Thanksgiving Day', on the fourth Thursday in November, has its origins in the harvest celebrations, and of God's wider provision.

At Harvest Festival we are reminded of how we are dependant on the good things that the earth produces and our duty to share them responsibly with those in need. Let us give thanks for the Harvest as we proclaim:

*All good gifts around us, are sent from heaven above;  
then thank the Lord, O thank the Lord, for all his love.*

(from a hymn translated by Jane Campbell from the original German of Matthias Claudius)



# Mike's message .....

## Light and Hope

This is the season of Light .... and Hope.

From long before the dawn of Christianity in these islands people have marked this time of year with festivals or rituals that involve fire or light. Many of these have been subsumed into Christian symbolism over the centuries. Some even into secular symbolism too.



At the beginning of November the Christian Church celebrates All Saints Day (1st November) and All Souls Day (2nd November). The old name for the former was "All Hallows" and the day before was "All Hallows Eve", from which the word Halloween is derived. Many people see a link here to the Gaelic or Celtic festival of Samhain. That marked the end of harvest and the beginning of winter or "the dark half of the year". Bonfires and feasting were, and indeed still are in some places, part of the celebration. The light and warmth of fire gives a sense of hope amidst the gathering gloom.

Even the tradition of bonfires on 5th November seems to pre-date Guy Ffawkes. Great fires may have had similar roots to Samhain - an attempt to banish the approaching darkness of winter, with all the dangers that it's darkness and coldness held.

Around the beginning of December (29th November this year) we enter Advent. Advent is a Christian festival that has hope and expectation at it's heart. We often mark it with lighting a candle each week. A herald to the birth of Christ, the Light of the World. Often these days Advent gets lost in the run up to Christmas, but it's a season of it's own. We are called not just to prepare for Christmas and it's celebration of the birth of Jesus at Bethlehem over 2000 years ago, but to prepare our lives to meet him again. As such Advent marks the start of the Church's year - an opportunity for a new start for each of us.

Then comes Christmas which, despite the commercial world's attempts to convince us otherwise, begins on the evening of Christmas Eve - and no earlier - but then lasts until 6th January (Epiphany). Christmas is replete with images of light - the Star of Bethlehem, the light brought by angels to shepherds, and of course the birth of Jesus:

*"The true light that enlightens everyone coming into the world" (John 1 .9)*

Someone said recently:

*"We can always take heart when we see a glimmer of light at the end of the tunnel.....  
.... unless of course it's a train coming in the other direction!"*

We need not fear though, even in these distressing times. We are preparing for the arrival of Jesus Christ:

*"What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people.  
The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it". (John 1 .3b-5)*