



Newsletter from the Bury St Edmunds Circuit  
for Sunday 12<sup>th</sup> July 2020

**Dear Friends,**

I know that at present we are studying the book of Ruth, but this week another Old Testament woman has been very much on my mind – Esther. The story of Esther is a later one than Ruth, set in the time of exile in Persia. Esther is a young Hebrew woman who becomes Queen of Persia and is then called upon to save her people, who are threatened by a devious plot from the king's chief advisor. Esther has kept her identity as a Hebrew secret from the king and to go to him without a royal summons means death, even for a wife of the king, but Esther is told "Maybe you were placed here for such a time as this..."

"For such a time as this..." These words resonate for me as we consider our place as church today. The government has said that churches may begin to re-open, but there is much work that we need to do in order to be able to safely do so. First and foremost in this is the need to look at what sort of church we are called to be to serve a post-COVID society. Lockdown has changed us all; there have been things that we have learned about our pace of life, the environment and our relationships that mean that we cannot simply go back to how things were. During lockdown, online searches for prayer surged by up to 50% and many more people accessed services through the media or online than would normally attend church. How can we respond to this?

Before she approached the king, Esther spent three days in prayer, fasting and preparation, knowing that she needed God's help with her task. In the same way we need not to rush in to re-opening our buildings without seeking God's guidance on what sort of Church he is calling us to be.

As we begin the work of getting ready to safely re-open, something that will take some weeks to get right; as we complete risk assessments and contemplate what we can safely do, can we put at the heart of our planning and deliberation reflection and discussion on how we can effectively reach out to a society aching to understand and come to terms with what has happened. The Church is here "for such a time as this", how can we faithfully and safely respond, not just to the needs of our members, but also to the wider world?

Blessings

*Ruth, Debbie and Rita.*

## From Northumberland Avenue

In these unpredictable times we are really appreciating being in touch with everyone via telephone and other ways of communication and also having the Circuit weekly services. It is good to have quite lengthy chats with everyone, to stay together and to know all is well.

We are pleased that our two Susan's have recovered from their times in hospital (not Covid-19) and also Freda is home again.



Looking back to some of our missed events:

just half of the Lenten symbolic items are around the cross, our Church Anniversary and Lunch, Women's Fellowship weekly Wednesdays afternoons and Fish and Chip Supper; and Saturday 27<sup>th</sup> June would have been our Grand Summer Fayre and Gift Day (the weather might have been too boisterous for outside stalls and Concert Band). We look forward to sharing new times together.

We thank Debbie for organising the replacement Gift Day for 12<sup>th</sup> July and all her support along with Rita and Ruth and the circuit team.

## Sunday Service

Both Rev Debbie and Rev Rita host a Zoom Sunday Service and anyone from the circuit is invited to join either of them. Please contact Debbie or Rita to obtain the link.

We also video a service and this can be accessed at

<http://trinitymethodistchurch.org.uk/worshipthisweek.htm>

## Thursday Evening Prayer

Rev Ruth leads a time of reflection, a live stream which can be found at <https://www.facebook.com/stjohnsmethodistchurchsudbury>

## Thought for the Day

Written by our Local Preachers and can be accessed at

<https://www.burystedmundsmethodistcircuit.org.uk/176052272319.htm>

**An update on our way forward including a day of prayer  
following the latest Government Announcement  
and Methodist Connexion Information**

Dear Friends

I hope you are keeping well and safe as we journey together through the pandemic. I have been delighted to hear of the wonderful pastoral links that each church has developed, people are finding extraordinary ways to share worship together and to keep in touch with one another. Ruth, Rita and I would like to thank you for your support in these times, the support to one another and to us. I have never received so many thank you cards, letters, gifts etc. and it is these that are keeping us going during very busy and difficult times.

I am sure you have all read that the Government has said that churches may open from 4<sup>th</sup> July, providing a number of conditions are met and that they can do this safely. They have said we may and not must, it is not mandatory to open.

As staff we have been prayerfully considering this along with colleagues from the District and Connexion and we have agreed, along with most of the Connexion, that the earliest we will open our buildings for worship would be September with a phased opening. However, and this is a big however, only if we feel it is safe to do so.

**Our First Priority is for your and our safety.**

The Government recommendation is that vulnerable people should stay at home, and there is a list of vulnerables which includes the over 70's amongst other considerations. Although the Government has relaxed restrictions Covid-19 has not gone away. We want you to be safe, we care for you, we love you and we do not want anyone to be put at risk. I am attaching the URC personal risk assessment.

Rev Ruth has written in her letter about reflecting into the story of Esther who listened to God, then planned and prepared – she did not rush into doing anything. This is a lesson to us all.

**Our Second Priority is mission as we establish the new norm.**

As the President of Conference has said, we cannot go back to the old. So I wonder - what will we differently as we emerge from Covid-19?

If you have internet access you may find this film clip thought provoking <https://www.youtube.com/embed/Hzgim5m7oU> you might think it strange to begin with, but stick with it!

We need to remember that “Church” can be wherever we gather or scatter, conscious of our calling as disciples of Jesus. Remember the building may have closed but the church has never closed. We have to think missionally.

We are therefore suggesting that, as a circuit, we spend a day of prayer on Monday 20<sup>th</sup> July to reflect on what God is saying to you in your situation and what God is saying to the circuit. Next week we will send out a Prayer Card with questions to reflect on. After our prayer day I would ask that you send you thoughts, ideas, the way you feel God is speaking to you about the new way forward to me either by post or email and I will collate them. More details next week.

**Reopening of our buildings**

After that we will be able to consider what needs to be done to reopen our buildings. The Methodist Connexion has provided strict instructions and we will be sending details to everyone in due course. Each church will need to nominate a dedicated responsible person for Covid-19 related health, safety and safeguarding matters who will be a single point of contact for everyone – however, if we could find someone who would be prepared to do this for the circuit that would help us all. Each church needs a team to support this person in decision making. It is the responsibility of the Church council, as the trustees of the church, working with the circuit and district, to develop phased approaches to reopening.

And so I am asking for volunteers from each church to take on these roles and if you feel able to volunteer then please give your name to your minister who will then notify me in my role as chair of each church council in the circuit. I will then be able to talk through with you all what is required to re-open. We are not anticipating that all churches will open at once; this will be a phased reopening.

So as you can see there is much to do before we can open safely,  
because to us your safety is paramount. We are worshipping God and  
that has never stopped and will always continue.

Keep safe, God bless *Debbie*