

Dear Friends,

As we look ahead to the New Methodist Year it is likely that we are not without some trepidation in doing so.

As Peter has moved on to pastures new and the uncertainty for Bromsgrove and other churches as to who would be their minister has hung in the air, all was far from clear as the circuit leadership team sort to take hold of a new vision for the circuit. Little wonder then that we may be hesitant as we set foot into a new Methodist year!

It is not uncommon at this season to refer to the poem written by Minnie Louise Haskins entitled 'God Knows,' but which came to be referred to by the more popular title, 'The Gate of the Year.' A part of this reads as follows:

And I said to the man who stood at the gate of the year:

"Give me a light that I may tread safely into the unknown."

And he replied:

"Go out into the darkness and put your hand into the hand of God.

That shall be to you better than light and safer than a known way."

So I went forth, and finding the Hand of God, trod gladly into the night.

And he led me towards the hills and the breaking of day in the lone East.

Written in 1908 the poem caught the public's imagination when it was quoted by King George VI in his 1939 Christmas broadcast to the British Empire.

The image of the Gate of the Year created by Haskins is an alluring one. It is almost as though she offers the reader a choice as to whether to enter through it or not. But of course, this is not so, and since we cannot go back, and we cannot remain at the gate, there is only one thing to do as we go through, and that is to "put our hand into the hand of God."

Some Methodist churches, as a traditional part of New Year observance have their annual covenant service, which acknowledges that our life of faith has many of the characteristics of a marriage relationship: that is, the union between the partners is legally established but their relationship needs to be worked at and may be at times intimate while at others estranged or even cold. The covenant service with its beautiful prayers: ***"I am no longer my own but yours. Put me to what you will . . ."*** call us to recommit to our relationship with Christ as both individuals and as a church. It asks us to honestly evaluate our attitude towards Him, our will, even our feelings about Him - the subjective nature of our faith and whether we are doing all that we can to maintain this.

Indeed, the covenant service is as much about the local church as it is about the individuals within it. The church is called to renew its passion for Christ and to treat as secondary its obsession with itself. It is a passion for Christ that alone can attract the outsider to faith in Him.

Deacon Janet Thomas and I will be covering ministerial duties for Bromsgrove until Christmas at least and possibly beyond in some measure. This is possible/manageable for Janet and myself because there are so many gifted people at Bromsgrove who will work alongside us to make it possible.

Let us then tread boldly into the year ahead by first taking the opportunity again to put our hand into the hand of God and trust that the new way forward for the circuit will be exciting, invigorating, strengthening and encouraging as we continue to grow in our faith journeys.

Shalom



Deacon Gwynn Bamford



Deacon Janet Thomas