Greasby Methodist Church
Minister: Rev. Phyl Fanning
Church Office: 0151 677 5127
Email: office@greasbymethodistchurch.org.uk

A letter for Advent from Phyl.

Dear friends,

Greeting as we enter the season of Advent. I am writing this letter having spent a week "out of action" and will be sending it out to the various churches I have responsibility for in one way or another. For some it will be the newsletter, for others a pastoral letter from the Minister whilst for others an addition to the notices.
This year, there have been lots of infections that have caused a lot of pain and suffering. I have not escaped from catching one putting me completely out of action for a number of days.
Following, taking the necessary time of to recover, comes the re-organization of all that needs to be caught up on as well as the ongoing material.
Every which way I look there are plans being made to celebrate Christmas. Some of those plans are close to fruition; others at best are sketchy. And as for the purchase of Christmas presents for the family …. That part of the to do list will need some significant effort to get it completed.
It would be all too easy to spend my time on focusing on that alone as it is quite pleasant thinking about what would be appropriate gifts for family and close friends.
But there are other things that need to be done and thought through.
It is all too easy for us to focus on Christmas and forget the season of Advent and for us in the Methodist Church our response to Christmas in the renewal of our Covenant with God at the beginning of the new Calendar year.
Advent is a time of exploration for us as Christians to help us understand what the real meaning of Christmas is. As I was preparing services for Advent and Covenant, I came across a hymn in Singing the Faith which I have no recollection of ever having sung before. This is a hymn by Carl Daw entitled "Wild and lone the prophet's voice" and is number 189. It is a hymn that draws on the whole of the message we find in the Bible. The first verse reminds us of the prophet's voice calling out the need for us to make a choice between good and evil. The second verse reminds us of the coming of the Lord Jesus and his bringing justice, truth and love. The third verse challenges us to journey on in faith through ways untrod until we see the Lord Jesus himself.
By examining the teachings of John the Baptist in this way, the author's words remind us that, to prepare ourselves for the coming of Christ, is a task that involves hard work, tough choices and an unflinching acceptance of divine justice.
Advent is a season whereby we are reminded as to why God had to send His Son into the world. As we look around the world today, what do we see day by day? Is it any different in essence to what might have been seen in the year that Christ was born?
The Creation narrative in Genesis reminds us that what God was created was good and beautiful.
Anna Briggs who wrote hymn 718 in Singing the Faith paints an accurate picture with these words:

"We lay our broken world
In sorrow at your feet,
Haunted by hunger, war and fear,
Oppressed by power and hate."

Within this broken world we live our day to day lives and suffer the pain of this brokenness at different levels both personal and communal. As human beings we do not like pain and we try to avoid it at all costs. For many this means a retreat into themselves or behind some other protective boundary or barrier.

Looking back over the years in sitting down with people and sharing their life journeys as they have been struggling I have realised how pain has the ability to turn the softest heart into one of stone. Through betrayal, rejection, bullying, manipulation, gaslighting or abuse, hearts that were alive with passion and vitality for reaching out and helping others have turned inwards in order to protect them selves from the pain. And then the guilt of doing so takes effect and they find it difficult to forgive themselves from this "hardening of the heart".

Advent enables us to reflect upon the promises of God to bring about changes in this world that he created and wants to restore.

God does not try and deal with problems of the world through being the greatest in terms of those who love power. Instead, God wants to change the world through the power of love.

"God so loved the world that he sent his only begotten Son".

Christ came into the world as that little baby to seek and save the lost through showing how much God loves each and everyone of us. He came to bring forgiveness into the world, to the family of God. Jesus still shows us today that to forgive is to set the prisoner free, for Christ came to free us from the tyranny of evil. Through his life and death, Christ offers us that forgiveness and freedom.

"Amazing Grace – how sweet the sound
That saved a wretch like me!
I once was lost, but now am found,
Was blind, but now I see."

One of the hardest things to do is to recognise that the prisoner that needs to be set free is yourself. The Good News is that Christ came to forgive you. If Christ came to do that, was is stopping us from forgiving ourselves as we think of the love God showed in sending Jesus. When we are forgiven, we find ourselves free to share the love that came down at Christmas with each other.

May I wish you a blessed Christmas and a Happy and prosperous New Year.

God bless,

Phyl