

Liverpool District Newsletter- June 2010

Dear Friends,

My car has, on its dashboard, one of those temperature gauges that tells you what the outside temperature is. The other day, in the midst of this glorious hot spell that we've been enjoying whilst at the same time wondering whether, in line with recent years, this is the one week of real summer that we will enjoy (and that tells you when I'm writing this letter!), my car temperature gauge told me that the outside temperature was 23 degrees centigrade. There I was, along with everyone else, in my summer gear – short sleeved, open necked shirt. And then I found myself recalling the weather record I used to keep (and for years afterwards bored friends, family and acquaintances silly with recounting the details of!) when we lived for more than six years in the Ivory Coast in West Africa. The lowest shade temperature I ever recorded in Ivory Coast was 23 degrees centigrade. And what's more, when it was 23 degrees centigrade we were all wrapped up in layers of clothing and woollen jumpers to keep us warm because it felt so cold! 23 degrees in the Ivory Coast and it was time for the woolly jumpers; 23 degrees here and it's shirt sleeves and throw off the duvet! Context – where we are; and experience – what we have adapted and become used to – and our response is totally different.

Context and experience. The first disciples experience the in-breaking of the Holy Spirit into their lives on the Day of Pentecost and are empowered to continue the work of Christ in their world. Read on in the Acts of the Apostles and discover again the varied contexts, and differing responses, that this new and empowering experience of the Spirit leads them into. The Gospel message of the God of love who is drawn near to us in Jesus, His Son, living, dying and rising that all might know life in its fullness in Him – that message of hope for all has not changed since the Day of Pentecost, and it is the message of hope that our world today needs to hear and respond to. But the context – our world today – in which that same message is lived and proclaimed, is very different from that experienced by those first disciples. Our context (at least in most of the white, western world) is one in which there is distrust of the institutional Church, unwillingness to make the commitment of belonging, questioning of the existence of a God of love and yet a searching for meaning and purpose to life expressed in many and varied forms of, what might be termed, spirituality. Our response as Christians to our changed and changing context flows from our experience of the living God, alive in us and among us in the Holy Spirit. And that response must, inevitably, lead to change in how, as Church, we understand ourselves, organise ourselves and present ourselves to the world of which we are part. Within this District of the Methodist Church we are seeking to embrace that change so that we might more effectively use the resources available to us for mission. But all our efforts to be effective in mission in our particular context will be of no worth unless grounded in and flowing from our experience of the living God, alive in us in the Holy Spirit. My prayer for us all is that we may be ready to embrace that change as we are led by the Spirit.

As I write this, Methodist Conference is once more rapidly approaching – the second volume of the agenda has just landed on my doormat! We gather this year in Portsmouth, where Alison Tomlin will become our President and Eunice Attwood our Vice President. Many of the more contentious issues before Conference have already been well flagged up – pensions, the future of Wesley College Bristol and of the Resourcing Mission Office in Manchester. There is much else of an outward-looking and mission focused nature as, for example, the report of the Israel/Palestine working group, advocacy of a world free of nuclear weapons, work on missing generations and urban mission – and much else

besides. Those attending Conference as representatives from this District are Anthony Clowes, Rod Hill, Sally Ratcliffe, Steve Cooper, Wendy Ross-Barker and Craig Price. Neil Stubbens will also be there as one of the Conference Record secretaries as will I. Time is now short and you may be reading this after Conference has begun, or indeed ended, but if you have particular concerns do raise them with any of us. Can I also take this opportunity of flagging up that Conference 2011 will be held in this District, in Southport? Next year Conference begins on Thursday 30th June 2011 (Ministerial) and Saturday 2nd July (Representative), ending on Thursday 7th July. There will be much more about this over coming months.

May the blessing of God's Spirit dwell in your hearts and guide you into His future for you.

With every good wish.

Jim Booth