



# The Aldershot and North Camp Anchor

Issue 49: Sunday 6<sup>th</sup> June 2021



Dear Friends,

As Joy and I prepare to retire in a couple of months' time, we have been trying to sort through some of our belongings – not least a large box of photographs. One of the photographs we found was taken by a photographer from the local paper in Rainham in Essex to go with an article about my appointment as the Methodist Minister and Industrial Chaplain in the Barking and Dagenham area.

In the picture, taken 36 years ago, I am sat at my desk. I have considerably more hair than I do today – but the desk is also very different from the desk which I currently use. There is a phone – but it looks very different from the phone I use today and there is no computer, no monitor screen and no answerphone. For many years I wrote all of my letters on a manual typewriter and the idea of email was something that I wouldn't hear about for some years.



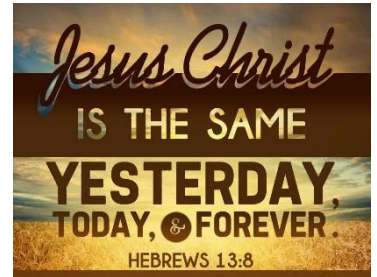
We live in a world of change and the Covid pandemic of the last 18 months seems to have accelerated the pace of that change. We have seen that accelerated change in what has happened on our high streets and in terms of employment with a pattern of home working becoming the 'new normal' for many people.

As we begin to move out of the current lockdown restrictions, there is perhaps a mixture of excitement and anxiety as we reflect on the future of the church. Many of us long to meet together face to face (without masks!) but at the same time we recognise that the future will not be like the past. We need, for example, to find ways to continue to reach out to those who have valued on-line patterns of worship and fellowship, and we

need to recognise that not all who were actively involved in the life of our churches 18 months ago will feel able to return to those responsibilities.

In this new and changed situation we are called to do two things.

The first is to continue to put our trust in an unchanging God and in the powerful promise of Hebrews 13 v 8 where the writer affirms that **'Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever'**.



The second is to be open to the prompting of God calling us towards new opportunities to serve Him in the church and in the community and to be prepared to offer ourselves in response to that call. The world ahead will have changed, but we are all still called to be God's faithful people.

The well-known hymn included below was written by Joseph Hart in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century. Much has changed since then but we are still today invited to put our trust in an unchanging God.

*This, this Is the God we adore,  
Our faithful, unchangeable friend;  
Whose love is as great as His power,  
And neither knows measure nor end.*

*'Tis Jesus, the first and the last,  
Whose Spirit shall guide us safe home;  
We'll praise Him for all that is past,  
And trust Him for all that's to come.*

Yours in His service

## Worship Reflection

O give thanks to the Lord, call on his name,  
Make known his deeds among the peoples.  
(Psalm 105 v 1)

### Hymn (StF 608)

All praise to our redeeming Lord  
Who joins us by his grace,  
And bids us, each to each restored,  
Together seek his face.

Prayer: Living God, for the joy of life, the joy of faith and the joy of knowing you, we give you our grateful praise. Amen.

## Bible Reading (2 Corinthians 12 v 1-10)

It is necessary to boast; nothing is to be gained by it, but I will go on to visions and revelations of the Lord. <sup>2</sup>I know a person in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up to the third heaven—whether in the body or out of the body I do not know; God knows. <sup>3</sup>And I know that such a person—whether in the body or out of the body I do not know; God knows— <sup>4</sup>was caught up into Paradise and heard things that are not to be told, that no mortal is permitted to repeat. <sup>5</sup>On behalf of such a one I will boast, but on my own behalf I will not boast, except of my weaknesses. <sup>6</sup>But if I wish to boast, I will not be a fool, for I will be speaking the truth. But I refrain from it, so that no one may think better of me than what is seen in me or heard from me, <sup>7</sup>even considering the exceptional character of the revelations. Therefore, to keep me from being too elated, a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to torment me, to keep me from being too elated. <sup>8</sup>Three times I appealed to the Lord about this, that it would leave me, <sup>9</sup>but he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness.” So, I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me. <sup>10</sup>Therefore I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities for the sake of Christ; for whenever I am weak, then I am strong.

### Reflection

There are many phrases or sayings that come from the Bible which have found their way into normal conversation.

Many people would, perhaps, speak of a ‘thorn in the flesh’ without realising that they were quoting St. Paul and his second letter to the Corinthians.

We don’t know the exact nature of this ‘thorn’. Scholars have tried to ‘read between the lines’ of Paul’s various letters and the descriptions of his life and have come up with a wide range of suggestions including spiritual anxiety, opposition and persecution or one of a range of physical ailments such as fevers, migraines or defective eyesight. This final suggestion comes in part from what Paul says in Galatians 6 v 11 when he writes, “See what large letters I use as I write to you with my own hand”.



Although we cannot be sure of just what Paul has in mind when he speaks of this ‘thorn’, what is clear is that this is something about which he has prayed to the Lord on three occasions without the ‘thorn’ having been taken away from him.

As we read what Paul writes, we see that it is not that God has not answered Paul’s prayer – but it is that God has answered Paul’s prayer in a different way. Paul had prayed for the thorn to be taken away, but God’s answer was to give Paul the strength to continue to face the challenge. “My grace is sufficient for you” says the Lord and this, says Paul, enables him to be content in the face of “weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities”

Paul has begun this chapter by describing (in a roundabout way) his own experience of being caught up into God’s presence – but that experience, 14 years previously, does not mean that he will not continue to face trials and difficulties. When we find that our prayers are answered by God not by our problems being taken away but by God giving us grace to face those challenges, it may not be easy to accept – but Paul’s experience of knowing that God’s grace is sufficient even in his weakness is an example to us all.

### Prayers of Intercession

This week let us pray especially:

- That people will continue to take care to prevent the further spread of Covid
- That politicians and scientists will work well together in planning the lifting of restrictions.

Gracious God, we ask these prayers through Jesus Christ, our risen Lord and Saviour. Amen

### Hymn (StF 51)

Great is thy faithfulness, O God my Father  
There is no shadow of turning with thee.  
Thou changest not, thy compassions, they fail not.  
As thou hast been thou forever wilt be.

Final Prayer: Eternal God, we put ourselves in your hands, knowing that your Kingdom shall come and your will shall be done, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.



The Anchor is on holiday next week.  
The next edition is planned for Sunday 20<sup>th</sup> June.