



The Aldershot and North Camp Anchor

Issue 52: Sunday 4th July 2021



Dear Friends,

Just a few days ago, the Methodist Conference of 2021 formally passed a resolution allowing me to 'sit down' (otherwise known as retire) from

active full-time Ministry. I was planning on being at the Conference in Birmingham, but the current restrictions meant that I could only participate by watching on-line. As I watched that part of the proceedings, my mind went back to the Methodist Conference of 1982, 39 years ago, which voted to accept me as a candidate for training for ordained ministry.

Over recent weeks I have been sharing my testimony at services that I have led, but, aware that many who read The Anchor have not been able to be physically present in church, I wanted to take this opportunity to share something of that story with you all.

My call to ordained ministry came on Sunday 17th February 1980. Joy and I were in the congregation of Guildford Methodist Church, which was then in Woodbridge Road, for the evening service. We'd been married for just six months, and I was in the early stages of my research studies working towards a PhD in Medical Biochemistry.

The preacher was Rev George Groves. He was a retired Minister from another part of the Circuit. I'd not met him or heard him preach before.

During the hymn before the sermon, while George Groves was moving between the lectern and the pulpit, I heard a voice which was as clear as if someone in the row behind was speaking to me. This was not something that I had experienced before nor which I have ever experienced since. The voice said, "Listen to this man, he has a message for you".

As I was still trying to make sense of this experience, George Groves began to speak. In his opening paragraph he explained that what he was about to do was something that he had never

done before in forty years of preaching, because every time he had tried to prepare the sermon he had originally planned to preach, he had felt God telling him to offer a call to ordained ministry to someone who would be present in the congregation that evening.

His words came to me as a great shock – not least because Joy, who was sitting beside me had vowed never to marry a Methodist Minister! Her father, Rev Eric Renouf, is a Methodist Minister and, although her childhood years had been happy ones, when we were married six months previously, her hopes for the future involved owning our own home and not having to move from place to place.

As George Groves went to the front door to greet people at the end of the service, Joy and I slipped out through a side entrance as I knew I couldn't look him in the eye. He had spoken God's word to us – but clearly Joy and I had much to talk and pray about.

It took six months of reflection and prayer and indeed 'wrestling with God', before we reached the point where we could resist the call no longer and we began to speak to others about what we had experienced. George Groves had not been well, and I remain deeply thankful that, after our six-month period of prayer and reflection, I reached the point where I felt able to write to him to let him know that indeed he had been speaking God's word to me in that evening service. We were able to write to each other a few times before George died. George's gracious letters have travelled with me ever since.



The journey of full-time ordained Ministry has taken us to Cambridge

where I trained, to Rainham near Barking and Dagenham in East London, to Verwood in Dorset, to Cornwall, to Cliff College in Derbyshire before bringing me back, full circle to the area where that journey began.

As we look back over that journey, Joy and I are thankful for the people that we have met along the way – not least for those we have met in the Circuit here. Above all we are thankful to God who called us to this particular pathway and who has blessed us and sustained us along the way.

Yours in His service

Chris Blake

Worship Reflection

Hymn (StF 322)

How sweet the name of Jesus sounds
In a believer's ear!
It soothes our sorrows, heals our wounds,
And drives away our fear.

Prayer: Sovereign God, for your blessings too many to number, and your goodness too wonderful for words, we give you praise. Amen.

Bible Reading (Isaiah 6 v 1-8)

In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lofty; and the hem of his robe filled the temple. ²Seraphs were in attendance above him; each had six wings: with two they covered their faces, and with two they covered their feet, and with two they flew. ³And one called to another and said:

"Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory."

⁴The pivots on the thresholds shook at the voices of those who called, and the house filled with smoke. ⁵And I said: "Woe is me! I am lost, for I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips; yet my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts!"

⁶Then one of the seraphs flew to me, holding a live coal that had been taken from the altar with a pair of tongs. ⁷The seraph touched my mouth with it and said: "Now that this has touched your lips, your guilt has departed and your sin is blotted out." ⁸Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" And I said, "Here am I; send me!"

Reflection

The vision of Isaiah described in the Bible reading above was clearly a powerful experience. Words written on a page strain to describe what Isaiah saw and heard. The climax of these verses is found in that moment when, in response to the voice of the Lord offering a call to service, Isaiah responds, "Here am I; send me".

Not all calls to service are as dramatic as that experienced by Isaiah, but each invitation from God to discipleship invites a personal response. It is so tempting when we have a sense of God's call to look around and to wonder who else might be able to respond and to find ourselves saying, "Here am I Lord – but please send somebody else!".

Isaiah's response is however both an example and a challenge to each one of us not to wait for others to respond but to say, with Isaiah, "Here am I – send me".

Prayers of Intercession

This week let us pray especially for:

- All involved in education at a time when studies and examinations have been greatly disrupted
- Those in public service, that they may serve with honesty and integrity

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

Hymn (StF 546)

Behold the servant of the Lord!
I wait Thy guiding eye to feel,
To hear and keep Thy every word,
To prove and do Thy perfect will,
Joyful from my own works to cease,
Glad to fulfil all righteousness.

Final Prayer: Living God, open our eyes to the adventure of faith and to the wonders of your purpose, and so help us to live as pilgrims travelling together in hope. Amen.

Circuit Service.

An open-air Circuit Service is being planned for Monday 19th July to say farewell to Chris and Joy Blake and to celebrate the achievement of five newly accredited Local Preachers. Assuming that Covid restrictions

are lifted the previous day, we plan to gather to sing and without numbers being limited. The service will be held at 'Little Oakley', Boundary Road, Dockfield, GU10 4EU (not far from Alice Holt Forest). The service is due to start at 7.00 p.m. and the garden will be open from 5.30 p.m. – do bring a picnic and meet others before the service. If the weather is wet, the service will take place at North Camp Methodist Church. Tickets are not required, but, to help planning, please let one of the Church Stewards know if you are expecting to be at the service.

