

Dear Friends

Yes, I'm back from sabbatical! Where did that 3 months go? Firstly, a sincere 'thank you' to all of those who did so many extra little things so that my husband Paul and I could be away from the manse. It has been an amazing time together and has done us the power of good. We have truly returned rested, refreshed, and renewed. We have also bought our forever home in Scotland, a beautiful rural cottage in a tiny village in Ayrshire only 25 minutes from our son and 15 minutes from the beach. In addition, we were welcomed into the congregation of a Church of Scotland where we regularly worshipped and were genuinely made to feel a valued part of their church family. I was even invited to speak on our final Sunday there. This has all been an answer to prayer. When I started my sabbatical, there were two snippets of scripture that kept coming to the forefront of my mind; 'For everything there is a season...' (Ecclesiastes 3) and 'I know the plans I have for you says the Lord...' (Jeremiah 29:11). Both these scriptures permeated the entire 3 months and were a constant reminder that we are held in the palm of God's hand. We do feel a deep sense of peace that we now know where we will be next year when I retire. Scotland already feels like a place where we are welcome, and we look forward to making it our home.

Inevitably during a period of 3 months, nothing stays still, for we are constantly on a journey, physically, mentally, and spiritually. For some of you, good life enhancing things will have happened, and for others the path will have been difficult, and you may be wishing you could turn back. There is an inevitable personal sadness that I have been absent and not able to accompany some of you during this painful time, but I have been thinking of you and praying for you. I give thanks to God for the lives of those who have died within the Circuit recognising their gifts and generosity and the love that they gave and received. I have also been made aware of those who are gravely ill and hold them and their families in prayer. Thank you all for the love and support that you give each other.

With this plan we welcome Wendy Bunting into our midst as the new Methodist Schools Chaplain. Please pray for Wendy as she joins our Circuit Team. Wendy brings a wealth of skill and experience, and I am confident that she will be an enormous asset in this new and exciting appointment. Please too pray for Rachel Pinkney as she begins the new stage of her ministry as a Probationer Presbyter in the Bishop Auckland and Shildon Circuit.

Nothing stays the same, change is a constant part of our lives, even if we don't like it! One look at the preaching plan when I first arrived in September 2019 and this preaching plan is a clear indication of how much change this circuit has experienced, but we trust God for the future. With that in mind I include a message from Melmerby Chapel and their well know and much enjoyed annual Emmaus Walk.

*'The Emmaus Walk was started in 1989 by the Reverend Kenneth Alton and Mr Tom Dunford, who was a member at Melmerby Chapel, to be held each year on the May Day holiday Monday. Their idea was to enjoy a pilgrimage walk, in beautiful countryside, leaving Melmerby Chapel after having the Emmaus story read from the bible and singing "When we walk with the Lord". Various stops were made for a prayer on route and the main idea was to walk with someone who was unknown to you, just like in the Emmaus story in the bible. The walkers called at other Churches and Chapels on route and stopped for a hymn and prayer in them, before carrying on walking back towards Melmerby for tea, which at first was taken in a lovely garden. Over the years there has been up to 40 walkers, including children, babies, and dogs, taking part in the walk. Until Covid the walk had only been cancelled once due to bad weather, but since then it has not been well supported and it has now been decided not to continue with it. The other Chapels and Churches in Coverdale have now closed so it is difficult to find a route taking in places to stop at. The members at Melmerby Chapel would like to thank everyone who has supported the Emmaus Walk. Janet Harker'*

So, as we embrace the next 3 months, we do so with confidence that God walks with us.

God Bless. *Rev Melanie Reed* (Superintendent).