

Liverpool Methodist District Newsletter – June 2012

Dear Friends,

One of the great gifts the Methodist Church offers its ministry is that of sabbatical – a three month period in which to step back from the particular post you occupy, to reflect and be refreshed around an agreed programme of study or other activity. As you know, I am just back from a time on sabbatical and it has indeed been just such a time of refreshment and renewal. So, first let me say ‘thank you’ both to the Church for this gift and to all those people who took on additional responsibility over the sabbatical period to make it possible for me.

This is not the place to give a detailed sabbatical report. There will be other opportunities for that. I offer just a couple of highlights.

I am fascinated by our attachment, as human beings, to the land – God’s good creation in which He has set us and of which He challenges us to be faithful stewards. Although it wasn’t planned for this purpose, I discovered that a visit to the David Hockney exhibition at the Royal Academy was a key element of this for me. It’s very difficult to put into words, but ever since that day towards the end of March when we looked at those paintings ‘in the flesh’ (so to speak) – totally unlike seeing images of them on post cards, or TV or the internet – pictures of familiar scenes of the Yorkshire Wolds, I have found myself looking at and seeing the natural world differently – shape and colour especially. It’s the same world but I see it a little differently, with fresh eyes.

Then, in Whithorn in Galloway, walking to St Ninian’s cave and seeing there the prayer cairns that people had built on the beach leading to the cave itself; seeing the names and dates of people’s visits to that place over centuries, made me realise again the importance of sacred space and place – somehow knowing God to be in this place. You will say, and I would agree, that God is in every place. There is no place from which God is absent. But it is still true, I think, that in some places – perhaps because of the generations upon generations of prayers offered – there is a particular sense of the presence of the living God. St Ninian’s cave – for me at least – is one such place.

So, a couple of highlights – there were many more. Seeing things differently and the reality of the presence of the living God.

And this I bring with me into my service of Christ’s Church in this Liverpool District. May our eyes be opened afresh to the ways in which God, by His Spirit, is leading us into His future for us. And may we always know the presence of the living God with us whatever the future may bring.

With every good wish.

Jim Booth