



*To all God's beloved in the Ripon and Lower Dales Circuit, who are called to be saints.  
Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.*

I write to you as I take up the calling of serving as Superintendent Minister. Firstly, greetings. I recognise that to many I remain just a name, with being eight months into Circuit Ministry here, still have local churches I look forward to meeting and sharing in worship together.

The last month has been a challenging time and a situation that nobody could have envisioned when we set off at the start of the new year. Everybody has seen the world and life they knew change and with it plans and expectations of what lay ahead.

This is particularly so for Revd Dr Pat Malham whose Circuit Ministry here, has seen its conclusion within this pandemic. Pat has served this Circuit faithfully, fulfilling her calling to presbyterial ministry with great passion, attentiveness and love. Pat has been tremendously generous in giving herself to serving God through Ministering across so many local churches as well as Superintendent of the circuit.

I have only had the pleasure of knowing Pat for a short time during her Ministry. What I have observed in that time is someone who loves the people of the circuit dearly. I have seen someone who is courageous in her leadership seeking a God shaped circuit.

I know many will have many testimonies to how you have been blessed by God through Pat's ministry amongst you. It is deeply disappointing that the Farewell service was not able to take place on the 26<sup>th</sup>. We all want to give thanks to God and celebrate the blessing that Pat has been to us and offer our prayers asking God's blessing for Pat and Damian as they progress into their new chapter of their story with God.

I also want to offer my thanks to Damian for his ministry as a local preacher. Also, for the sacrifices he will have shared with Pat in his supporting role. We know that Ministry impacts the whole family and Damian has always been gracious and generous in providing hospitality. Not least, thank you Damian for your sense of humour and commitment to proclaiming the gospel in a very grounded and accessible manner.

Following the guidance from The Connexion, Pat is on Sabbatical although not as planned and having this Sabbatical in isolation. I do pray that this will provide a different space for Pat to receive from God in a new way having given so much out in serving God. So please do join with me in offering prayers for Pat and Damian.

The correspondence I have received during this time from around the circuit has been positive, all things considered. I have heard of how people have more time in conversation with family and friends over the phone or video calling. I have heard of people joining with live worship being stream from churches across the country. People have been joining with millions of others in worship via the various BBC broadcasts.

In most cases the church, meaning the people, have seen an increase in their worship life and churches around the globe have seen an increase in engagement from others beyond the church walls. So, looking forward I ask the question; 'what will God be asking us to continue with following this pandemic?'

Whilst studying at Cliff College, I became familiar with several phrases which seemed to emerge time and time again. One was about worship and I imagine it featured heavily within lots of assignments. It was this, 'Worship is a lifestyle'.

What this phrase conveyed was that worship is more than an act in all senses of the word. Worship as a lifestyle goes beyond those dedicated times of gathering for Acts of worship to each moment of one's life. It is recognising God is with us all the time and striving to live out holiness, whilst acknowledging truthfully one's situation and circumstance.

Worship as a lifestyle is about the very core of who we are knowing God living in us. I note this because I believe it helps when looking to answer the question; 'what will God be asking us to continue with following this pandemic?' We will be seeking to answer this question both collectively as church. Perhaps more importantly, will we be seeking to answer this question individually as we live to follow Christ.

Comments about learning lots during this pandemic have been widespread and often accompanied by saying 'the world is going to look different when we re-emerge.' For me, it is about asking the God question. How has God been teaching us and how is God shaping us?

When we re-emerge, the difference will come from how we have met with God during this time. To frame it another way, we will be different having been with God during this time. God makes all the difference and recalling Jesus' words 'I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener' found in the Gospel according to John, let us remain in the love of Christ now and always.

*Gareth*

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