



Dear friends,

I ended my last reflection with an invitation to scrunch through Autumn leaves...and with our November mailings you are receiving resources designed to encourage those of us who can to get out and about, to encounter God in the natural world. We hope you will enjoy 'Paying attention to small spaces' in this week's mailing and a prayer activity which is coming next week. For those of us who remain indoors, there are similar resources for taking time to reflect and pray from within our homes. Grateful thanks go to Rach, Guy and Chris for their work on these.

This focus on encountering God in the natural world has grown from comments offered in your responses to the Circuit questionnaire over the Summer. We have some feedback from the questionnaire to prompt our thinking further, which you'll find on the reverse of this letter. Look out for Advent reflections focussing on the Methodist Way of Life, coming soon to a screen or a booklet near you!

As I write, as I mention Advent reflections, I know that so many are already wondering about Christmas. Wondering what that time, which so often has a pattern and an order all of its own, in families and in churches, will bring this year. I am not going to pretend it's easy, I'm not going to pretend it will be comfortable...it is hard to plan in any way, and many of us are simply working on the assumption that this year will be different, and that we will not know what kind of 'different' until it's almost here. I do, though, want to challenge any suggestion that Christmas will be 'cancelled'. Our experience of it will be changed, and that change will likely bring pain for many – but individually, and together, we will begin to learn ways to weave the story of this year into our telling of the eternal story of the Word made flesh – and our capacity to be “story keepers’ for those in and beyond Church, and ‘story tellers’ of the Good News of Jesus” will grow. As a circuit team, we are aiming to continue our practice of providing worship in written, digital and ‘in person’ (as this is permitted) formats right across Advent, Christmas and into the New Year, and we hope and pray that the pattern we offer will allow us all to encounter the mystery of ‘God with us’ once more.

*Courage in the face of uncertainty.  
Steadfast love when the way twists daily,  
when everything we used to be sure of is obscured from view.  
Please. This is what we need.  
We have firm ground for this moment,  
this hour,  
maybe for this day,  
and our heads know that this should be enough...  
But when even tomorrow is so  
obviously shrouded in mystery  
that we cannot even pretend that plans can be relied on,  
please be with us.  
Be with us  
in ways so clear that we know for sure you are with us.  
Emmanuel, thank you...*

Peace, Jo