



Dear friends,

This week has been a challenging week, as we work towards the reopening of a number of buildings in the Circuit over the next couple of months. So the first thing for me to do as I write is to say a huge 'THANK YOU' to so many people for so much hard work...

Thank you to those who are working on risk assessments and planning documents, to church councils who are engaging in difficult conversation and decision-making, to those who are enabling reopening for 'in person' worship, and to those who are deciding that this is not the way forward for their community at this time, and who are finding good ways still to stay in touch with one another. Thank you for listening to one another and 'watching over one another in love'. We anticipate a 'mixed economy' of 'in person', digital and written provision of worship for the foreseeable future. Please rest assured that a return to gathered worship in some places, on some occasions, is an addition to, and a rebalancing of, the worship resources we have shared during 'lock down', not a move away from provision for worship at home.

I have had a request from one or two people to resend the link for the circuit questionnaire which has been circulating over the past few weeks. This is an opportunity for you to reflect on this time of 'being church' during lockdown, in order to help us shape the way forward. It can be found at <https://rach916755.typeform.com/to/OFKnqh48?fbclid=IwAR1iPr8ipRDWrFUr-OgUsfdowdBsxWN0te-g8klswwlPxZvaEtzQVEAxdc8>. For those of you who receive the mailing by post, you can request another copy from the office to be sent to you in next week's envelope.

As some of you know, in more ordinary times I love to retell our stories of faith using Godly Play. The scripts are written in language which has rhythm, which is easy to learn and to remember, and which has repeated phrases to help us make links between one part of the biblical story and another. As I prepare to lead worship with a congregation in a building for the first time in about four months, a fragment from the story called 'The Great Family', Abraham and Sarah's story, comes to mind. As we begin that story with a group we say something like "the people in Ur believed that there was a god for every plant, a god for every animal, a god of the sun, a god of the moon....the world was alive with gods for them...but there was one family in Ur who believed that there was one God and that all of God was in every place....they didn't know then if that was true, but that was what they thought...and that one family was Abram and Sarai's family...".

"There was one God and all of God was in every place..."

Just roll that thought around in your mind for a moment or two... Is that your experience?

I wonder how and where you encounter God? How do you encounter God in the familiar? And what about in the unknown, the new, the strange?

If you read the account of Abraham and Sarah, and their family, in the book of Genesis, you will notice that their understanding of God everywhere did not stop them from pausing in particular places where they encounter God, to 'build an altar'. God always and everywhere, God in this place where we are right now, whether it be familiar or new, and particular places which help us to pause and encounter God more fully, to which we can return... all these matter as we live our life of faith. To them, of course, we add a gift which was not necessarily there for Abraham and Sarah as they came to know God - the gift of the community of the people of God...

Gracious and Holy God,  
may we know you with us, always and everywhere,  
may we encounter you in experiences familiar and strange,  
may we find places in which we can rest in your presence,  
may we love and be loved in the community of your people.

In the name of Jesus we pray.

Amen

Peace, Jo