

AMERSHAM FREE CHURCH

(A Baptist Union and United Reformed Church)

Woodside Road, AMERSHAM, Bucks, HP6 6AJ

Minister: The Revd Ian Green BA MTh

Associate Minister: The Revd Erna Stevenson BTh MSc

Registered Charity Number 1137287



The Revd Erna Stevenson

Wednesday 1st July 2020

Dear Friends,

Last week, like some of you, I too have visited the church. It was an interesting experience. Outwardly, everything looked the same and it did feel like coming home. The feeling continued on entering the building, the key still worked in the door and at first sight all the familiar things were there in the vestibule. The rack for the photo albums on one side and all the AFC information on the other.

Yet, something wasn't quite the same. The normally welcoming armchairs were turned towards the wall as if saying, this is not a place to linger. Then the table, which used to house a great array of churchy papers was bare, all the material once thought to be important, now cleared away. And another table, which didn't used to be there, now displayed the essential sanitising gels and tissues. Glancing into the Sanctuary – the same experience, mostly the same but with subtle changes, chairs re-arranged, hymnbook trolleys tidied away and so on.

It seemed to me to be a symbol not just of our church life, but life in general as we are gradually trying to come out of the Lockdown caused by the Covid -19 pandemic. Things are essentially the same and yet they are not the same. Heraclitus, the ancient Greek philosopher put it in those immortal words: “ You cannot step into the same river twice”. Though it comes from the same source, it is unmistakably a river, it may even be *the river* you stepped into before, but it is not the same river. Because of its constant flow, it will have been affected by all sorts of different influences. It may have picked up leaves and flowers, pieces of wood, stones and pebbles and the touch of other humans, who stepped into it further upstream.

This is what it's like to step into this new chapter of our church life. In essentials, it will be the same: we will gather to worship the God, whom we serve and whose people we are. We will meet the same friends who are bound together with us in the faith but within the framework and rules of a new situation. As a result of Tuesday's Team meeting our worship pattern from Sunday 5th July 2020 will change and have the following three options:

AUDIO SERVICE: this will be in a slightly simplified format and available first thing on a Sunday via the website.

MORNING SERVICE at AFC: 10.30 am in The Sanctuary, with physical distancing provisions in place. **An advisory sheet will be posted on the website towards the end of the week which we hope will be of help for people as they prepare to attend this service.**

VIDEO SERVICE: The Morning Service will be videoed and this, after it's been processed, will be posted on the website later in the day on Sunday. *Please note all three services will have the same sermon!!*

On all your behalf I want to say once more a big Thank you to Michael and Matthew for their technical know-how and to the Team meeting members for their thoughtful organisation in preparing us for this new phase. Today we are also very grateful for all the work Laura, our Administrator, has put in to the 're-design' of the AFC website this week.

Beyond these preparations what gives us hope and quiet confidence to navigate these first tentative steps, is that the divine Spirit, to whom Heraclitus himself owes his being, holds together both change and continuity. In the prophecy of Malachi God assures the people of God: “*I the Lord, do not change*” (Mal 3:6) meaning that the relationship is upheld by God's own faithfulness. Yet, in another prophetic insight God's nature is revealed as the source of change and the source of newness: “*Watch for the new thing I am going to do. It's happening already – you can see it now! I will make a road through the wilderness and give you streams of water there.*” (Good News Bible) That flowing, life-giving river again!

So, as we prepare to step back into the same, yet ever changing flow, we give thanks to the eternal Source of Life and all Goodness and ask for the grace to so affect the river ourselves that those down-stream from us may also be encouraged to step into the flow and be refreshed by it.

Ian joins me in sending you our love and best wishes.

Erna