

February 2019

Dear Friends,

I recently heard a talk about happiness. It was said that if we seek happiness, we will probably not find it, but if we lose ourselves in a greater meaning and purpose, we do indeed find happiness.

This is nothing new. The writer of Ecclesiastes, around 3,000 years ago, sought out happiness and declared that everything was vanity and blowing in the wind. Jesus said something similar: Anyone who wants to save their life will lose it.

The life that is focused purely on self may result in amassing wealth or property, but does not guarantee happiness. It seems to be a paradox whose lesson has not been learned by the consumer society that expects life to be all about self-fulfilment.

In January, we have all taken part in our Covenant Services, one of the greatest gifts that Methodism has to offer to the wider church. The Covenant Prayer starts with the words: "I am no longer my own but yours. Your will, not mine, be done in all things..."

As Christians, we are called to live for God and for others. In Methodism, we talk of our Calling – to worship, learning and caring, serving and evangelism. While learning may be about building ourselves up in terms of our knowledge, the fact that it is linked with caring means that we learn so that we can care for others more effectively. Thus, every aspect of our calling is about looking outwards from ourselves: worship towards God; learning and caring, service and evangelism towards others.

Yet, as we worship God and become caught up in his majesty, we are filled with awe and wonder. When we focus on his love and grace, we discover that we are a new creation. Irrespective of how unworthy we may feel, we are now declared to be children of God. As we care for others and serve others, we discover the gifts that

God has endowed us with and are encouraged to develop them. As we seek to live lives that give glory to God so that others may know about him, we ourselves are transformed and changed.

Jesus said that he had come that we might have life and live it to the full. We find that fullness in offering ourselves to God, not in seeking to satisfy ourselves. I came across a song, *Blessings* by Laura Story, that was played recently on UCB1 (United Christian Broadcasters, available on digital radio). The lyrics ask:

‘Cause what if your blessings come through raindrops?  
What if Your healing comes through tears?  
What if a thousand sleepless nights are what it takes to know  
You're near?  
What if trials of this life are Your mercies in disguise?

What if my greatest disappointments, or the aching of this life,  
Is the revealing of a greater thirst this world can't satisfy?  
What if trials of this life: the rain, the storms, the hardest  
nights,  
Are your mercies in disguise?

What if the things that we fear the most, the things that seem to tear at our self-worth, are the very things that God uses to move us from our sandy foundations of reliance on comfortable circumstances to the rock of his grace and love? What if we need to lose ourselves to find our greatest meaning – being loved unconditionally and loving others in the same way? What if we are truly found only when we are ‘lost in wonder, love and praise’?

With every blessing,

David