



FROM THE CHAIR

The Revd Dr David A. Hull

Dear Friends,

How wonderful to have an edition of MET Connexion focussed on the gospel! Of course, we seek always to be focussed on the gospel, but this edition is explicitly so. 'I am not ashamed of the gospel', the apostle Paul famously wrote, 'because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes' (Romans 1:15). I am sure the Lord is looking for - and calls us to be - people who are not ashamed of the gospel: the gospel, the whole gospel, and nothing but the gospel.

This gospel has ramifications for every aspect of life. I am fascinated by the fact that, having made that bold statement about the gospel, Paul immediately went on to pen one of the most controversial passages of the whole New Testament, describing how God is at work within the present age, as true today as it was then: 'the wrath of God is being revealed'. He described a downward spiral in which human beings turn away from God, exchanging his glory for idolatry and his truth for lies, and drift further and further away from him. It is a terrifying thought. It brings to mind science fiction images of an astronaut being cut free from the space ship and left to drift helplessly into space. It is a story that is illustrated daily in the pages of newspapers, on the airwaves and over the internet.

The gospel tells us how Jesus stepped into that downward spiral to reconcile us to God through his death and resurrection. It is because the gospel has ramifications for every aspect of life that Paul challenges all Christians everywhere: 'Do not be conformed to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind' (Romans 12:2). Living in this world, we have been shaped by the pattern of that downward spiral more than we would wish, more than we realise. The Church can all too easily be shaped by it too and, because it is all so familiar to us, it is easy not to notice it happening. I'm always struck by the solution that Paul holds out: it begins with the renewing of our minds. May the Lord make us truly gospel-minded people!

Paul, both in Romans and in other letters, is clear that the implications of the gospel transform even our most intimate

relationships. This is the final edition of MET Connexion before this year's Conference, which is due to vote on the controversial God In Love Unites Us resolutions affirming cohabitation and same-sex marriage. Throughout these debates, we have encouraged evangelicals to remain within the Methodist Church for as long as possible - at least until the Conference makes its final decisions - though we recognise that some churches have found it necessary to seek to leave earlier if they are not to lose significant numbers of their members.

The strategy has been simple: 1) Speak out, calling the Church to remain faithful to its current teaching; 2) Build up, linking with others in your locality to strengthen one another in our common commitment to the gospel for all people and for all of life; 3) Count the cost, because there is often a cost for faithfulness; a number of churches, members and ministers have already discovered that the cost can be great indeed.

MET will continue to speak out and call the Church to remain faithful. When the Conference has made its final decisions, making it clear exactly what situation we face, we will then gather to seek the Lord's guidance for the next steps. We have been clear throughout that MET is committed to supporting all our members, whether the Lord leads them to stay in the Methodist Church or to seek to leave. For each, the all-important thing is to 'do whatever he tells you' (John 2:5).

The results of the Synod votes in these matters have been deeply concerning. They do at least show that there will be a very significant number of Methodists throughout the Connexion, even if a minority, who will be utterly at odds with the decisions, if the Conference votes the same way. There has been a strong feeling of bereavement shared by many as the results have become known. It is a feeling I have known for some time. I'm reminded that, towards the end of 2019, I attended a meeting about my own future within the Methodist Church at which I was clear that I had no intention of resigning, but I would not be able to continue to uphold the doctrine and discipline of the Church if it changed in the way that is proposed, and the response I received was greatly distressing. Afterwards, I had to drive across the country to my next meeting and hit heavy traffic. At one point we came to a complete standstill and I looked around. Following my satnav, I had just driven into Olney in Buckinghamshire and, amazingly, had stopped directly outside St Peter and St Paul's Church. It became a moment of wonderful comfort as I thought of the ministry of John Newton in that church and remembered the hymn written there by his great friend, William Cowper, 'God moves in a mysterious way':

*Ye fearful saints, fresh courage take,
The clouds ye so much dread
Are big with mercy, and shall break
In blessings on your head.*

May the Lord keep us faithful to the gospel in all its fullness.

At times 'sorrowful, yet always rejoicing' in our partnership in the gospel,

David