

Dear Friends,

Throughout this past year I have been asked the same question: How is the church doing? To which, if I am honest, I don't have an answer. I have often responded by saying that I will only be able to answer that question when we are all gathering for worship again, and our activities are up and running.

The Church of England announced the other month that they think their congregations might be down as much as 20% on pre Covid figures. The Baptist Union announced during the Assembly a considerable drop in giving to Home Mission by the member churches over the past year. Our own local Baptist Association's budget has been reduced by 16% this year, and our own weekly giving is considerably down this year. With all this uncertainty it is really hard to evaluate how the church is doing.



Last Sunday was Pentecost, and I was reminded of how things must have been for the disciples as they gathered in fear and uncertainty, not knowing what the future held, but knowing that those who put Jesus to death were still out there. They had experienced 50 days of uncertainty, not unlike the uncertainty and anxiety we may have experienced during the Covid pandemic. Yes, Jesus had risen from the dead. Yes, Jesus had conquered death by his death. Yes, the disciples had touched him and shared meals with him. However, they were still overcome by their doubt and fear. They huddled together behind closed doors because they were uncertain about the future and were too frightened to publicly proclaim the risen Lord. I suspect that we have a lot in common with that first group of disciples.

Over the coming days we will have time to share together, reflect and lament. But as we prepare to return to some semblance of 'normal' we need to keep in mind that we never emerge from a crisis just as we were. The world has changed, the church will have changed and you and I will have changed, for better or worse. But we must always remember that God's Spirit frees us from fear and gives us hope for an exciting future.

May the Spirit of God breathe upon us all to dispel all our fear and anxiety, and fill us with strength and hope, because where the Spirit is, something is always happening; where he blows, things are brought to life. Amen.

May God's richest blessing be yours

