**Sermon**

**10am Congregation – Wesley Methodist Church**

**Sunday 19 April 2020 – Easter 2**

**Leader: Philip Garside**

***A New Life***

“Now you’ve got my feet on the life path, all radiant from the shining of your face.
Ever since you took my hand, I’m on the right way.”

Let’s pray: May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts and minds, be acceptable to you, O God, our redeemer and our liberator. Amen.

I have called this sermon, A New Life, A New Life.

We are ordinary people living through extraordinary times.

Our country and every other country in the world are on a war-footing. But for a change we are not fighting with other countries, not dodging bullets and bombs, which we can see. We are battling a virus, a sneaky, nasty virus that we cannot see. Even though we can’t see it, we can still feel its effects on us, on our families, and others in our communities if we are unlucky enough to be exposed to the virus and it catches hold of us.

Some powerful things are happening to us, with us and around us, at the end of the third week of our campaign against this virus. Our government has adopted a radical, compassionate, new, two-word policy: “Be Kind!” I’ll say it again, “Be Kind!”

Things have moved very fast. We were given two days to prepare to isolate ourselves with our families and households. And as a community we responded. Our schools have closed, most of our workplaces have closed, our churches and other places where people gather to worship have closed, our sports and outdoor recreation activities have stopped, our choir rehearsals and concerts have stopped. We don’t know if our actions have worked yet. There are promising signs, but we are still awaiting the final outcome.

Here’s the thing. We have all heard the evidence from scientists and medical specialists, we have listened to our emergency management experts, we have listened to our Prime Minister (who has been supported by all political parties in Parliament) and we have said collectively, “Yes, let’s do this.”

The usual way of doing business and the values that we place on the work that others do is changing. Who and what is now of real worth? We suddenly realise who is really important. Supermarket checkout people, and the drivers who deliver food from warehouses to the supermarkets we queue up to shop at, are just as important to our day-to-day survival as doctors and nurses. [pause]

As I understand it, to change a habit or vice that is not good for you, you first need to recognise that you need to change. Then you need to consistently change your behaviour. After two weeks you start to be transformed. The longer you behave consistently well, the more likely it is that your transformation for the better will become permanent.

Some of us have been working from home for years. Now a sizable proportion of the workforce is having to do the same. Suddenly, online meeting tools like Zoom are being used, and people in several places realise they can hold a face-to-face meeting or conduct lessons remotely. Airlines are parking their planes because few people now want to fly. I can see that in the future more people will work at least part of their week at home and avoid commuting. The benefits of travelling to out-of-town meetings or conferences in other countries will be closely scrutinised. In many countries the air in their major cities is clear and pollution free for the first time in decades because people are not driving their cars as much.

As part of providing for us, the government has offered employers generous wage subsidies to pass on to their workers. And rules for other benefits are being loosened. The government is printing money to keep people fed and housed and to keep the economy moving. Maybe the time has come for governments to offer their citizens a universal basic income.

I would be delighted if the old capitalist, selfish economy, was replaced by an economic and political system based on compassion, which ensures that everyone’s needs are met. [pause]

People of faith look to their scriptures and religious traditions for guidance on how to live their lives.

The start of Psalm 16 says. “Keep me safe, O God.” That reflects the first part of our campaign against the virus.

The Psalmist goes on to say: “My choice is you, GOD, first and only.” And, “Now you’ve got my feet on the life path.” Here is ancient wisdom for us. As most of us pause from our usual work and daily activities, we have time to give ourselves a spiritual health check. Are we following God’s way? If not, we need to make some changes.

The first letter of Peter, picks up these themes and overlays them with the experience of Jesus as Messiah. “You never saw him, yet you love him. You still don’t see him, yet you trust him.” We can’t see the virus, but we know it’s real and a threat. We can’t see Jesus or God, but we know they are real and point us to better ways of living, of loving our neighbour.

For once, the government and the scriptures are in harmony. Be kind. Be compassionate.

Let’s create a new normal, a new life focused on The Way of Jesus. We must grasp this chance for change. There is enough for all to live well.

In Jesus name we pray, Amen.