

Dear Friends,

One of the highlights of the last month for me has been listening to the vice president of conference, Jill Barber, talk at Synod about Methodist heritage. I must admit I wasn't holding out much hope of enjoying it never mind being excited by it, after all we are meant to be looking forward, planning for the future not wallowing in our past, right? When Jill isn't serving as vice president of conference she is the project director at Englesea Brook chapel and museum of primitive Methodism, a heritage for mission project. Jill is passionate about telling our stories to engage people from outside the church. Jill has many opportunities through her job to engage with people who don't have faith, some come to Englesea Brook to research their family history and through talking with Jill and learning of their ancestor's faith hear the good news and discover faith for themselves. That's very simple evangelism if you ask me! Using the old, our heritage, to engage with the new. Our past is very important to us and of course we shouldn't forget it or disregard it but we also shouldn't be worshipping it or hoping to go back to the way things were.

Isaiah says something similar:

Isaiah 43:19 New International Version (NIV)

¹⁹ See, I am doing a new thing!

Now it springs up; do you not perceive it?

I am making a way in the wilderness

and streams in the wasteland

The Israelites had come to believe that the only way God could work was like he did in the Exodus, when he delivered his captive people from Pharaoh's grasp. A few verses earlier Isaiah refers to the path through the sea, and the chariots and horses of Egypt that perished. It was as if he was saying, "yes that's how God did it in the past. But just wait...! He continues by telling them to forget the former things! Let go of the assumption that God can only act in one specific way. See I am doing a new thing!

That new thing as we know would be Jesus. And as we know the religious leaders and those in power failed to recognize that God was not limited to acting only as he had in the past. God's plans are eternal but his methods are always changing. It seems to me then that we have to weed out what we don't need to carry forward with us and work out what it is about our heritage that do want to carry forward with us.

One of my favourite hymns is by Fred Pratt Green, The church of Christ, in every age. 415 in Singing the Faith. It has a line in the first verse that says the church "must claim and test its heritage" which seems to me to be exactly what Jill was talking about at

Synod. My question then is, what are the things that we value that we would want to pass onto those around us? What is the story that we are passionate about that needs telling above everything else?

Every blessing

Rev Jan