

Dear Friends,

Some years ago I met a patient in hospital who was a Christian and a member of one of the several local Baptist Churches in the area. Although I had never been to that particular church I knew that it had a reputation for being a community that was growing, forward-looking with a developing ministry among young adults and children. Even a passer-by could see that something was happening in the church because there was a building scheme to redevelop the frontage. This surprised me because I had known the church 25 years previously when one of my relatives attended it from time to time. In those days it was declining, rather inward-looking and the congregation was mainly elderly. I am always pleased to hear that any local Christian Church is growing but I wanted to ask this lady, *'what brought about the change to where you are today from where you were 25 years ago?'*

The lady replied: *'about 20 years ago we had a church meeting. We realised that if we carried on in the same way, the church would fade away and that is not what any of us wanted. In faith we decided to have something of a revolution. We made changes to most of the things we did and significantly we stepped out in faith and, although we could not really afford it, we decided to appoint an associate minister not to work with the people that we already had but to work in the wider community with people we did not have.'*

Many football fans are rejoicing with Leicester City, a previously unfashionable club that has just won the Premier League. This is made all the more remarkable by the fact that the Christmas before last they were bottom of that league. Their success emulates the success of another club from the East Midlands, Nottingham Forest, which was another unfashionable club to achieve a similar feat. The manager at Nottingham Forest in those days was Brian Clough who when asked for the secret of success replied, *'we do the simple things well.'*

The story of the Baptist Church is a reminder that sometimes we get to the point where we need a new vision and we need to step out in faith. The story of Leicester City and Nottingham Forest is a reminder that we need to do the simple things well. A key verse in the Bible for me is Acts 2:42: *'They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.'* A new vision is not a new business plan! Instead it is something that we believe is God-given and that is revealed as we begin to focus again on the core elements of the Christian life: the fundamentals of Christian teaching (the divinity and Lordship of Jesus, personal salvation by his death on the cross and resurrection, the presence and power of the Holy Spirit in the life of the church and the individual believer), a commitment to the local community of believers, to holy communion and to personal and corporate prayer. Can we come to autumn church councils focusing on these things?

In this quarter, we celebrate 200 years of Methodist witness in Brixham. May we prayerfully join with our friends there 'to praise Him for all that is past and trust Him for all that's to come' (*Hymns and Psalms 277*).

*John Haley*