

Dear Friends,

*For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures; that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Peter and then to the Twelve. After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles, and last of all he appeared to me also, as to one abnormally born. (1 Corinthians 15:3-8)*

Have you ever used the phrase 'occupational hazard'? I could easily call it an 'occupational hazard' that people often talk to me about church. Is it an 'occupational hazard' – or should it be an 'occupational blessing'? I suppose it depends how you use the opportunity. Over the years, I have learned how easy it is to talk to people about church. For a start, to most people the 'church' is the building. I think we find it relatively easy to talk about church buildings. People also have an idea about what happens in church, and I think we easily talk about that. When I ask church members, church stewards and church councils about what sort of church a local congregation might aspire to be, they often reply 'welcoming' or 'friendly'. You can't fault that, can you? However, this is not the unique selling point of the church.

The Apostle Paul wrote at least two long letters to the church in cosmopolitan Corinth (there were probably more than the two in our New Testaments). The church there was struggling with all kinds of problems – some which are unfamiliar to us today, others which are still all too familiar. Towards the end of what we call his first letter, Paul reminds them that he had told them the things that were of the greatest importance – namely, Christ died for our sins, he was buried, he rose again, he appeared to the apostles. It's important that we also constantly refocus on these things.

At the front of the majority of church buildings there is a cross. At the heart of our faith and worship stands a symbol of death! Our sharing in the bread and wine around the Lord's Table is primarily a solemn yet joyful remembrance of the death of Jesus Christ – because when he died he died for us, and for our sins – the characteristics of our rebellion against a holy God. For many Christians, the empty cross is also important. Jesus was there then but he is not there now – for he is risen! Paul makes reference to the burial of Jesus as if to show the Lord really did die – we use the phrase ourselves, 'dead and buried'. That normally indicates finality – but not with Jesus. Not only did he rise again but appeared and was seen by the apostles (and lastly by Paul).

'Apostle' literally means 'sent one'. Unlike the other apostles, Paul was not with Jesus in his ministry in Galilee and Jerusalem. He was a much later convert (Acts 9), and he was 'the last of the apostles' because he was the last to see the risen Jesus. Although there have been no new apostles since Paul, the church shares in the apostolic ministry because we are all sent ones with the good news. When sharing the good news, do make sure to tell people the things that are of first importance – Christ died for our sins, he was buried, he was raised, he appeared. Tell others how knowing Jesus has changed your life and hold out the promise that he can change their lives too. An easy way to do this is by passing on a Gospel to a friend (a copy of Luke's Gospel is available from the circuit office for anyone who would like to give one away) and being prepared to talk to them about Jesus.

This quarter we welcome the President of the Methodist Conference, Revd Loraine Mellor, into the circuit. This is part of the 200th Anniversary Celebrations of our Southfield Church building – a souvenir booklet produced by Catherine in the circuit office will be available from Southfield or from the circuit office. I am sure all the churches in the circuit send prayerful good wishes to friends at Southfield for their special year.

*John Haley*