

## **Carol's reflection:**

I have missed eating with you. It has been so long since we have been together – for coffee or tea, for a snack at a gathering in the church hall, or a dinner together with Caught in the Act Theatre Co. to follow.

I have missed eating with you. I have missed the gathering for worship when we break bread and lift a cup and walk the leftovers around the room so that the youngest do not have to wait.

Hmm. That's a part of our tradition though, isn't it? Waiting.

At TMUC we wait to eat communion until everyone has been served and then we eat together. In pre-pandemic days, at public worship there would be servers who would carry silver trays with small cubes of bread to the ends of pews, where those trays would pass through the congregation so everyone could take a piece of bread, and those same servers would do the same thing with larger silver trays filled with small cups of grape juice so that everyone could have a cup of juice. And we would say specific words when everyone had a piece of bread in their hand and we would eat together, and then we would do the same thing with our small cups of juice. We would wait to eat together. We would wait to drink together. We have seen waiting as a sign of respect, and a sign of inclusion.

We don't make the very young wait though. In pre-pandemic days, when TMUC gathered for a Sunday communion worship Jeff and I shared the table bread with the youngest. They were still served the common communion bread, but we whispered to them, 'this is the part for which you do not have to wait'. For us it was a symbol of God's generosity, God's extravagance, an echo of Jesus' welcome and embrace of the little children. Here and now, this is for you – you do not have to wait!

And, at the same time, everyone – including those same children – are served the bread and the cup for which we do wait. Waiting unites us. We wait for the moment of sharing together. God's love is not just for us in our solitude, God's love is for us in our community. And, we need our children to know that. We need our children to know that waiting is important, and it is a blessing.

Waiting can be a good thing in those circumstances. Waiting reminds us of our connection to community.

Perhaps that has never been so clear as it is right now – we are so anxious to be together, to have this pandemic 'done and dusted', but it is not. And so we wait. We wait in respect of keeping everyone safe. Waiting has been love.

There is a question on our minds though. How long, O Lord? How long must we wait?

It's a good question.

And it is unclear to me how we will discern the answer. The Church Council will meet on Wednesday September 8 to discuss that discernment. How do we know when to open for Sunday worship in person? How do we live a Gospel of love and welcome? How do we keep people safe?

The Gospel reading today has Jesus in conflict with the scribes and the Pharisees – again... It seems that there is always a disagreement between them about how to follow God. In simplest words, the scribes and the Pharisees were all about the details of the law. Follow this rule, follow that rule. And, in today's reading, Jesus will not have any of that.

Jesus is focussed on helping people understand that our call to live love for one another is more important than the details of saying the right words in worship, or similar things. He quotes Isaiah with words about honouring God with our lips but not our hearts – not in how we live our lives.

And then when he is finished explaining that to the scribes and Pharisees, he turns to the crowds with the same message. It is not what is out there that might make us turn away from God. Sadly, that's on us. But so is the other side of that. God's grace is lived out from within us too. The call to follow God is found in here – in our hearts, and in our actions that come from there.

It is a call to live in love.

So, how is love lived today? With masks and vaccines? With closed buildings and online worship? With buildings that are opened for the pre-registered? Is love lived in waiting or is waiting finished?

I hope that you will keep the Church Council in your prayers as we try to discern God's call. And, we hope that you will share your thoughts too.

That's how we try to live – all are welcome, all are loved, all are beloved of God.

May God bless us this day and always. Amen.