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Dear sisters and brothers

As I’ve mentioned in previous letters, these letters will be fortnightly from now on. This is partly a consequence of the easing of restrictions that are ongoing which means that I am now only sending out a postal mailing every two weeks. I’m pleased to say, however, that our Sheltered Housing based congregations are able to meet again. The first service in Stocket Grange will be on the 19th September and in Woodhill Court on the 3rd October. This Sunday in our Community Centre service we will be ordaining Vanda Noble as an Elder. We are also welcoming Katrina Blackwood, a student who will be with us for 6 months, and an introduction from her is attached.

September will be the 18th month since we first entered “lockdown”. Recently someone commented to me that at “their age” eighteen months is a long time. While it is true for all of us that a lot can change in a year and a half, for those in the early and later years of life the changes can be more pronounced. As we begin to see more of each other, I am often caught off guard by the size of some of the children I haven’t seen for that long, while others speak of being that bit frailer than they were when I last saw them. The pandemic has caused many different forms of loss, some more obvious than others: and it is worth acknowledging that, for some of us at least, there has been a loss of precious time.

Psalm 94 contains a well-known line: “A thousand years in your sight are like a day that has just gone by”. The psalm was written in response to national disaster which raised many questions for the writer and caused them to reflect on the fragility of life and even question God. But it begins with the statement of faith that God has been “our dwelling place through all generations”. It then ends with a prayer based on the understanding that, whatever stage of life we are at and whatever we have been through, joy and peace come from trusting in the compassion and mercy of God.

The psalm reminds us that when we have faced loss, in whatever form, or have gone through difficult circumstances, we need to acknowledge our experiences and our feelings about them – but we need to do that in the light of God’s might and mercy. Coming together in worship, whether at the Community Centre, Stocket Grange or Woodhill Court, allows us to do that together. We are still in the midst of the pandemic, and some may not yet feel they want to return to a congregation. In order to make it easier for everyone, we will continue to do all we can to make our services safe (including wearing face-coverings and keeping our distance) and so, when you are ready, I would encourage you to come. But whether or not you manage along to a service, I pray that you would know the reassuring and strengthening hope of God’s presence which does not change from day to day or year to year.

With love from Sarah and myself,