



THE WAY AHEAD

October 2021

WHERE IS YOUR COMPASS?

Thomas said to Jesus, “*Lord, we don’t know where you are going, so how can we know the way?*” (John 14.5). Thomas, so often maligned as ‘the doubter’, surely speaks for all of us. We have heard the Lord say, “*See, I am doing a new thing!...do you not perceive it?*”, but our natural response is, ‘Lord, how can we see it when you haven’t told us what or where it is?’

Times of change and uncertainty are difficult. How do we navigate new waters without a map? How do we discern which direction to take without a compass? Where do we find a safe place to rest without a harbour? Where do we find security without an anchor? How can we see the way ahead if we have no vision? Even when we know that Jesus is the answer to all these questions, we still flounder and so often succumb to the temptation to hold on to the familiar oars, which give us the feeling of being in control of our little boat at least. But this is a time to be stepping out of the old vessel, keenly fixing our eyes on Jesus, and discovering that we can walk on the water!

Jesus’ first words to his disciples were simple: “*Follow me!*”. He says the same to us today and, as we look for the ‘new thing’ in the midst of global change and uncertainty, we must heed Jesus’ simple response to Thomas, “I am the Way”.

ASCEND - SEE - PRAY - ADVANCE

It is stating the obvious to say that the view from the top of a building is very different to that at ground level. What if we had vision that could see the detail on the ground at the same time as a global picture? This is the perspective given to us when we ask the Lord for His vision.

Over the past twelve months we have held monthly Maranatha gatherings online. The Lord called us to ‘ASCEND’ and, as we have responded in worship, affirming that we are seated “*with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus*” (Eph 2.6), He has brought revelation, through which we are learning, afresh, how to pray.

Our ascent has not been like the hard work of climbing a steep mountain but more like learning to soar on the thermals as eagles. We are learning to see through ‘new eyes’, to pray from a new perspective and to ‘ADVANCE’ with a new authority, in Christ.

“The Lord is the everlasting God...his understanding no one can fathom... He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak... those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint.” (Isaiah 40.28-31)

GOD KNOWS

And I said to the man who stood at the gate of the year:
“Give me a light that I may tread safely into the unknown.”
And he replied:

“Go out into the darkness and put your hand into the Hand of God.

That shall be to you better than light and safer than a known way.”

So I went forth, and finding the Hand of God, trod gladly into the night.

And He led me towards the hills and the breaking of day in the lone East.

So heart be still:

*What need our little life
Our human life to know,
If God hath comprehension?
In all the dizzy strife
Of things both high and low,
God hideth His intention.*

*God knows. His will is best.
The stretch of years
Which wind ahead, so dim to
our imperfect vision,
Are clear to God. Our fears
Are premature; In Him,
All time hath full provision.*

Then rest: until

*God moves to lift the veil from
our impatient eyes,
When, as the sweeter features
of Life’s stern face we hail,
Fair beyond all surmise
God’s thought around His
creatures
Our mind shall fill.*

Minnie Louise Haskins.

TRANSITION - a Journey of Waiting

We first sensed the Lord saying that He was doing a 'new thing' at the beginning of 2013. A small group had met to consider the planning of some Maranatha gatherings in Ireland for that year. As we prayed, there was a clear sense that the Lord was saying we should plan nothing. Although we didn't know it then, that was the beginning of a time of transition for the Community.

During the subsequent months there was more confirmation that the Lord was about to do a 'new thing' and the anticipation grew over one, then two years. At the end of 2015 our beloved brother Dennis departed from us, completing his term of inspirational, visionary leadership for the Community. The transition to the new leadership team was smooth as the Lord had already put everyone in place.

Just over a year later, as we prepared for our Annual Gathering at Quinta Hall, there was a deep conviction that this would be the time when the Lord would reveal the 'new thing' He had been preparing us for. It happened; but not as we expected! We were stunned to hear God say to us "lay it all down". After offering the Community back to Him, there and then, we took a year to listen, pray and share, as widely as possible, in order to discern together how this was to happen.

At the beginning of 2018 Maranatha members gathered once again, this time to complete what the Lord had called us to do the previous year. Our guiding verse of scripture was John 12.24: "*Very truly I tell you, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds.*". It was very important that we were of one heart and mind as we placed this precious Community as a single seed into the ground. We shared tears in grieving. And then a new time of waiting began....

Because the Lord had repeatedly promised something new, we believed that this was not the end of the Maranatha Community. However, we were also sure that He had called us not to simply have a break or just give up some activities, we were called to lay down the life of the Community - to die. We endeavoured to be faithful to this in a number of practical ways: all centrally arranged gatherings ceased; our database of members was archived along with office files; we ceased all campaigning initiatives. What we encouraged to continue was the prayer cell network and local Maranatha groups, along with the strengthening of personal relationships. Just as the seed buried in the ground contains within it the potential for new life, we were eagerly waiting expectantly for resurrection.

Waiting is always difficult, but waiting for something unknown is particularly challenging! When Jesus appeared in resurrected form His closest friends didn't recognise Him - He looked different! Some years previously we had been given the word "same clay, different form". How should we prepare for this new way of being? We endeavoured to stay close to the Lord, as soft clay, listening to His Spirit, responding to His promptings, resisting the temptation to take any initiative, remaining open, trusting Him.

When the Lord wanted to shape His people for the Promised Land He led them into the wilderness - the unformed place - so they could be shaped for what lay ahead. Some wanted to go back to Egypt and more certain things, but they needed to be formed differently for a new time and place.

At the beginning of 2020, the three tasked with leadership of the Community all felt that it was time to gather again, without agenda, simply to listen to the Lord together. It seemed good to set the date for the first day of spring. However, the long-awaited reunion was hijacked by a different kind of 'new thing': Covid-19. A rapid reconsideration resulted in the first ever international Maranatha Gathering on YouTube! We reaffirmed our oneness in Christ, joined by the bond of God's Spirit, in all the far flung places where we were at that moment. A new way of gathering was 'born'.

Almost two years later we sense that the time of waiting is coming to an end. The 'new thing' is here. We may ask, "but what is it?". The Lord asks us, "do you not perceive it?". In our online gatherings we have been listening to the Spirit together. We believe the 'new thing' is a new way of seeing, a new perspective; new vision for this new time. We are taking small steps forward, not presuming to know the way, but trusting our Shepherd to lead us, attentive to his voice. The future remains unknown, but the waiting on this part of our journey appears to be over!

Let's pray that our time of waiting over the last few years will help us to prepare well for the Lord's return. Jesus says, "*when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?*" (Luke 18.8).

We pray Maranatha! Come Lord Jesus!

A RENEWED CALL TO UNITY, RENEWAL, HEALING

ONENESS

From the beginning, our call has been to 'BE ONE' and to pray and work for the oneness of the Body of Christ. As we have shared in the prayer of Jesus for the oneness of His Bride (John 17), we have been graced with a deep love for one another and for all God's people.

It is only in love that we can truly be one. Our oneness does not come through our agreement with each other but, rather, by our agreement with the Truth - there is one body, one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all. (Eph 4.4-6).

God is love (1John 4.16). Jesus prays that we, His followers, would be one in the very same way that He and the Father are one - in love. It is surely for this reason that Jesus commanded His first disciples to "*Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another.*" (John 13.34). It is only in this way, as Christians of all traditions, nationalities and cultures live in love for God and one another, that God will be revealed to the world. John puts it this way: "*In this world we are like Jesus*" (1John 4.17).

We believe the Lord is calling us to embrace a deeper oneness with Him and each other, in this new time, as we renew our commitment to pray and work for oneness in the Body of Christ.

NEWNESS

In this journey of transition from the old to the new, we - the people of God - are called to lead the way. If we are to be effective catalysts for transformation in the world, we must not only be renewed ourselves daily by the Holy Spirit, but we urgently need to have the eyes of our hearts opened to the new thing the Lord is doing. The Lord is revealing a new perspective. As our vision is renewed, so we are able to impart new vision to others, especially within the Body of Christ.

A new way of seeing must be accompanied by a new way of thinking. The Lord makes it clear that if we want to know His will, we need to be transformed by the renewing of our minds (Rom 12.1-2). This is not a one-off occurrence, but a continuous process. Neither is it an individual's transformation alone, it is the corporate renewal of the way we think so that, through the teaching and discernment of the Holy Spirit, we can have the Mind of Christ (1Cor 2.12-16).

To fully embrace the 'new thing' we have to let go of the old. The old is not bad, but it will become a hindrance as we step into the new.

We believe the Lord is calling us to a radical openness to Him and a new freedom in His Spirit, so that we will be transformed and be catalysts for transformation in the world.

WHOLENESS

Despite ever faster advances in technology and communications we are seeing the signs of an increasingly fractured world, filled with immense human suffering.

In the UK and Ireland we see the impact of broken relationships at every level of our society: escalating mental ill-health, especially in the young; huge numbers of children suffering the pain and insecurity of parental break-up; a widening chasm between the older and younger generations; inter-racial tension and mistrust with the uncovering of the wounds of historical injustices; an increasing disparity in the prosperity and even life expectancy of the rich and the poor. The list goes on.

There is only one source of true healing - the love and mercy of God, offered to us through Jesus Christ. He calls us, His people, to be ministers of His reconciling, healing love. This ministry starts in our own lives by putting right all wrong relationships - forgiving those who have wronged us and seeking forgiveness from those we have wronged. We can then reach out and pray for those who are struggling, offering the hope and healing of Jesus.

We believe the Lord is calling us to a new measure of faith and confidence in the healing power of Christ, to be released through each one of us, as members of His wounded Body in the world.

KEYS TO THE KINGDOM

The possession of keys gives us the authority to lock and unlock doors. Jesus puts it this way: "*whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.*" (Matt 16.19). The use of the keys to the Kingdom, with the authority of Jesus, requires that we are first fully submitted to Him. Jesus goes on to put this authority in the context of righteousness and the need for unity in agreement (Matt 18.15-20). The Lord has shown us the way of submission to one another out of reverence for Him. We are learning how to use the keys to His Kingdom.

"Prayer does not equip us for greater works — prayer is the greater work."

Oswald Chambers

THE ARK

The Ark is the name of the home owned by two Maranatha members in Flixton, Manchester. It has been a special place of prayer, hospitality and healing over the past 17 years. Many Maranatha gatherings, retreats and other events have been held there and many Maranatha members have enjoyed its hospitality.

Earlier this year Marie and Linda sensed the Lord saying that the ministry of The Ark was completed and that it was time to sell the property. Remarkably, within a few hours, another Christian ministry was brought to their attention. The property was a perfect match for their vision.

Everything seemed to be happening very quickly at first, but the new ministry has not yet been able to raise the necessary capital, or to find a suitable investor.

In keeping with the prophetic nature of this house, Marie and Linda are in a period of waiting for the Lord's timing to complete the sale of the house. Please pray for them.

A PRAYER

Lord,
please touch my eyes
to see the new thing you are revealing;
loosen the scales
that have accumulated
through the hardness
of my half-believing heart;
heal the scars of shock and dismay
to correct the distortion
of my limited vision;
restore to me tears of compassion;
let me see through Your eyes of Love.

“What do you want me to do for you?” Jesus asked him. The blind man said, ***“Rabbi, I want to see.”*** (Mark 10.51)

LOOKING FORWARD AFTER 40 YEARS

The gathering of Christians from different church traditions, which birthed the Maranatha Community, took place on 7th November 1981.

40 years has significance Biblically: the children of Israel journeyed for 40 years in the desert before entering the Promised Land; prior to this, Moses spent 40 years in Egypt, then 40 years in the desert. This period of time is often associated with a time of testing or preparation and it is the span needed to raise a new generation.

At our next online gathering, on the first Sunday of the month, we will celebrate 40 years of the Lord's preparation of the Maranatha Community for such a time as this; and we will look forward together with the Lord for our next step in this new stage of our journey.

Union with God
is a song
that does not die in the hearing,
a flavour
which does not abate in the eating,
an embrace
which gives delight without end.

St. Augustine

MARANATHA OFFICE & TASTE & SEE BOOKSHOP

The Maranatha office now occupies just one room in the premises we rent at 102 Irlam Road, Flixton, and is faithfully run by our sole member of staff, Charles Parker. Downstairs, the Taste & See Bookshop and coffee-shop continues to provide a valuable service, selling books, cards and gifts, as well as being an open door for those in need of a chat, thanks to a small number of dedicated volunteers who keep the shop going.