

**Wednesday 17th June 2020 Samuel and Henrietta Barnett 1913 and 1936**

Dear Friends

Last weekend Liz and I took a walk along a disused railway line, now converted as a ‘trail’ for the user of walkers, horse riders, runners and cyclists alike. It was a gorgeous day, the dogs were with us, and overall, we all had a wonderful time walking through gorgeous countryside.

However, twice during those ninety minutes, we experienced a clash of expectations as a cyclist thundered past us without slowing down with potentially disastrous results for one of our dogs. For the cyclist, the appeal of a long stretch of pretty level ground is irresistible. The same is, of course, true for us. But what that then means for cyclist and walker alike is quite different.

This story represents one of the challenges of being part of the Christian Church. We have different expectations as to what church ‘is’ and what is asked of us as disciples. With different stories behind our journeys of faith, we have different experiences to offer and different needs to be met. Thankfully we are not all alike.

We are now at the beginning of a process in which we need to think afresh about our congregational lives here in Bromsgrove. Much has changed in the past three months and we cannot simply return to how things were before the virus struck. Some things have become more important to us; as a result of which, some other things feel less critical than we might have presumed before.

So, thank you to everyone who has returned their questionnaire to date. There is still time as the deadline is not until the 30th June. (Questionnaires can be emailed to me, posted to me or dropped through the letterbox at the vicarage in Finstall Road.) I urge you to get involved please so that any future decisions made by the DCCs or PCC will be as informed as possible.

It is only fair to say though, that as we are a mixture of walkers, cyclists, horse riders and runners, to use the analogy, it isn’t possible to come up with a viable form of church that is going to please everyone. Our willingness to compromise is even more important for the future of the church than it ever was in the past.

As the top of this letter reveals, today is the day we remember Samuel and Henrietta Barnett. As you can imagine, to be remembered in the Anglican liturgical calendar requires one to have a list of achievements to your name. The Barnetts most definitely do, listing among their attainments, early advocacy of universal pension provision and the creation of Hampstead Garden Suburb which provided decent housing and open space for people on very modest incomes. The Barnetts are perhaps best known though, for the creation of Toynbee Hall in Whitechapel, the first of the ‘university settlements’ designed to give educational opportunities to the poor.

As the church looks forward – both locally and nationally – into an uncertain future for our communities, we will need the vision of modern day Barnetts to advance the cause of the poor and impoverished of our nation. With every support mechanism of our communities weakened by the virus and the economic collapse that has accompanied it, the material and spiritual poverty that is following in its wake is almost beyond what living memories can recall.

I am not going to pretend to offer easy answers or swift solutions to any of this. But I do earnestly believe that a church that is active in the lives of its communities Monday-Saturday, will discover new depths of meaning when it gathers for worship on Sundays. I am praying that COVID19 has taught us that the Kingdom is built on the streets and not in our Church buildings.

With my continuing love and prayers,

David Ford, Rector

01527 873831 revdavidford@googlemail.com