

I AM WITH YOU ALWAYS



Forum 2018

'I am with you always'
– together in God's mission –

Ruth Gee, Forum Moderator **Introduction to the theme of Forum**

Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. When they saw him, they worshipped him; but some doubted. And Jesus came and said to them, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.'

'I am with you always – to the end of the age.' Isn't that a wonderful promise?

I expect many of us can remember times when the simple presence of someone with us was immensely important. Perhaps in a time of great sadness or of fear when all that could be offered was the presence of some-one who cared – and that presence, that person alongside was profoundly comforting. Or it might have been a shared joy, an experience in a particular place at a particular time which was intensified because it was shared with some-one else.

Think and share with neighbour.

'I am with you always' Jesus said to the disciples at a time of huge uncertainty for them.

Did you notice that although they worshipped when they met Jesus on the mountain top – some doubted. Some were not sure what was happening. Some didn't fully understand. Some still had unresolved questions – and surely none of this is surprising. No-one had ever experienced anything like this before, Jesus had risen and the foundations of the world had been shaken. Old certainties had gone and though new hope was dawning it was too new to be understood or depended upon. So some were uncertain, some doubted.

And while they were uncertain, while they were still wondering what to do next, before the way was clear to them – Jesus commissioned them to go and to make disciples. On his authority

and sent by him they were to continue to teach as he had taught, to live in obedience to him and to share the gospel with others, making disciples.

These uncertain followers of Jesus were commissioned by him and once commissioned were given the assurance that they would not be left on their own – 'I am with you always', he said.

Sisters and brothers in Christ – we live in uncertain times. Economically, politically and socially the foundations of the world have been and are being shaken. Truth is being redefined according to personal agendas. People continue to be treated as commodities. Populations are on the move for many different reasons. Institutions which were once trusted have been shown to be less than perfect. The way ahead is not clear.

And in all this uncertainty, in these changing and challenging times – Christ calls us to join in his mission, to go and make disciples of all people, to share the good news of God's love freely offered to all.

Knowing that the risen Christ is with me and calls me to follow him is at the heart of my life as a Christian. I don't believe I am alone in this, am I?

Do you share the conviction that we are called to follow Christ, to share God's love and to make disciples?

This conviction we share, this calling to which we respond knows no denominational boundaries. We are called to realise the gift of unity already given us in Christ. We are called to walk together in God's mission.

Throughout England, in our local communities, Christians are together in God's mission. We are responding to local need. We are engaging with community leaders, working with them and challenging them. We are engaging with MPs and government, often asking the difficult questions. We are supporting asylum seekers and refugees. We are feeding the hungry and working to alleviate food poverty. We are together in our cities, towns, villages and hamlets. We are together as we develop links with the work of Christians and others across the world. We are together in mission and we know that the risen Christ is with us always; always loving, always calling, always challenging and always offering new life and new hope.

The Forum is an opportunity for us to gather in the presence of Christ, to share in worship and fellowship, to be challenged and affirmed in our rich diversity and to learn from one another as we are open to give and receive gifts and to the movement of the Holy Spirit among us.

We should not underestimate the challenge of these times. We have to find new ways to help people to meet with Christ in the places where they find themselves. We have to know Christ so well that we can recognise his presence in the most unlikely places, in the dark, depressing and dangerous places where people long for companionship and need to be loved.

We are called to walk these new ways together – together with one another and together with Christ.

I am delighted that Rachel Parkinson has agreed to be with us at Forum and to help us to explore our theme in a creative way. Rachel is a Methodist Minister currently serving as the Chair of the Wolverhampton District. She has many gifts, among them that of helping others to explore faith and meaning in very creative ways.

I now invite Rachel to describe one way in which we are invited to explore our theme together.

Ruth Gee

Given on 17 September 2018 at CTE's Forum

For the video, click the link on www.cte.org.uk/Forum2018/afterwards