

## **Weekly Bible Study for Highcliffe and Bransgore Methodist Churches**

Acts 11 v 19 - 26

The Growing Church

Liz Ward w/c 24<sup>th</sup> May

It is one of those 'trick' questions which preachers ask to see if you have been paying attention. All of us know the 'correct' answer but, in our hearts we just yearn to wind them up by saying what we really feel. So, the question - "What is church?". Yes, we know the answer is "The people", but.....we also feel affection for the building, the atmosphere, the sacred space, the images, etc.

It is surely appropriate at this time to re-visit that question - "What is church?". We can't go into the building, it is empty and quiet, no hymns or prayers resounding around the walls.

During the last few months church has come into our homes, come via a printed sheet, an email, a video link or through our TV. We have worshipped with family or alone, although not really alone as we have remotely joined with others in the experience. Hopefully church has also come to us through phone calls and emails as people have kept in touch to offer support and encouragement.

As I write this we are still meant to restrict travel (although the message is a little muddled). The apostles had no such restriction. Barnabas went from Jerusalem to Antioch to see what was happening with those who had fled persecution, a journey of about 758Km. He then travelled to Tarsus to see Saul (11,350 Km) and they went back to Antioch.

I wonder how far our messages/services have travelled from our churches during these last few months. It is reported that many online services have been watched by those who would not normally attend on a Sunday morning, in some cases they have been watched by ten times the regular congregation. Maybe that is just for entertainment, but I very much doubt it. Maybe it is because they don't have to make the effort of getting up and dressed or they can pause it and rewind if they want to. I trust that the reason is that people yearn for messages of hope, they are seeking something bigger and better than they were getting in the hustle and bustle of life before this which focussed on getting 'stuff' and looking after yourself. Deep within them is the desire/need to find a relationship with God and experience the love of Christ, a need which had been smothered by the ethos of society.

Persecution in the early church was obviously a challenge, but it also offered opportunities as people travelled. Lockdown has been a challenge, but it has offered opportunities for the church to consider new ways of reaching people, especially the people who would not otherwise come into our buildings.

1. How have you responded to the new ways to worship?
2. What do you think churches can take from this to continue to do in the future?
3. How can we, as church, and you, as an individual, help to spread the Gospel message?
4. How far are you prepared to 'travel' to ensure that others hear about Jesus?
5. If you have access to The Message read the description of Barnabas in v 22 - 24, what does that teach you?