

*Invitation*

*We are pilgrims on a journey,  
and companions on the road;  
we are here to help each other  
walk the mile and share the load.*

*Richard A M Gillard (b. 1953)*

Grace at nine months, is making progress. She is learning to crawl.. backwards.

What a shock as she finds herself stuck in a corner! Her usual smiling countenance has a puzzled expression: 'What now?'

Then the gentle words of encouragement come from those around her, inviting her to join them.

She is going forward into the welcoming hands of those who love her so dearly. Joy!

Isolation, in it's various forms, has impeded progress for so many, but it has also driven many people and organisations, backwards. Not only have the rules changed, (we understand why) but by necessity, there are more.

Following rules. We know about that. Perhaps we need to consider which of the many rules we live by, are the ones we should continue to follow. In or out? Ruled by our fears of judgement by others. Fear of sin and punishment. Driven by unconscious biases (Life long habits!)

At last, after this long period of isolation, we have the prospect of life opening up. Yet we seem to have more doubts and anxieties. Feeling bereft and vulnerable. The familiar all but disappeared. Struggling to find the opportunities that are beginning to appear amid the losses. Without the usual frame work in place and fear of being exposed. Challenged by change.

Former excuses for failing to step up won't stack up any more "It's too overwhelming" "It's not my place." Life has changed and is calling us forward!

Jesus came among a people who were defined by religious rules and reinforced by the fearful, ruling politics of the day.

Rules designed to try and maintain beliefs and the status quo. Necessary and reassuring for some, a place to hide for others and worrying for those who felt threatened by that level of control.

Jesus questions their system and challenges their understanding.

His presence begins to change their perceptions.

Eating with tax collectors. In or out?

Jesus, by sitting and eating with them is saying "we are all in". He contrasts the love of God with the exclusiveness of the Pharisees and teachers of the law.

*Luke 15:2*

We don't need to follow a set of rules to prove we are holy or that we are loved by God. This is not because of anything we have done, or not done, but because of who God is. Many think that our relationship with God is based, not only on what we believe but our ability to keep 'the rules' and what people think of us.

Everyone is invited to 'the banquet'. Jesus invites us all. We are challenged again to learn a new way of being together.

Jesus, Christ, a new creation, our Sovereign Lord, is saying, I have come to tell you everything has changed.

We are reminded that the one who rules should be like the one who serves.

*Luke 22:26*

Rewards in heaven are given to those who serve without thought of reward. God gives out of grace, not debt.

*Matthew 25:35*

God reconciled us, the sinner, by Christ's physical body, His death. He presents you, holy in His sight, blemish free, if you continue in your faith.

*Colossians 1:16*

A new living way opened for us through the torn curtain.

*Hebrews  
10.20*

Nothing changed in heaven but everything changed on earth.

Together we can realise this afresh. We know this through our own experience of being called, confronted and challenged.

This understanding builds solidarity, with each other, and is rooted in God's love.

Valarie Kaur, the author of the book, 'See No Stranger', writes: 'Look upon the face of anyone and to choose to say; "You are the part of me I do not yet know."

Our Good Shepherd gathers his flock and others, so there will be one flock, one Shepherd. *John. 10:11-18*

He calls us by name. His endless mercy follows us.... *Psalm 23*

As we are being soaked by the sun and bathed in gentle breezes of this blessed spring, may we experience the everlasting love in which we are held. Let us go forward, accept the invitation to be enlivened in the challenge of our lives to learn new ways of being together.

*'Brother sister let me serve you  
let me be as Christ to you;  
pray, that I may have the grace to  
let you be my servant too.'*

(Richard Gillard- see above)

*AMEN*