



1st September 2023

'God walks slowly because he is love. If he is not love he would have gone much faster. Love has its speed.' (Kosuke Koyama, *Three Mile an Hour God*, p.8)

Dear friends,

During the summer I have been reading a collection of short sermons and articles by the late Japanese theologian, Kosuke Koyama. Koyama grew up in Japan during the Second World War amidst the devastation caused by the Tokyo fire storm and the two atomic bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, actions brought to recollection during the summer by the release of the film *Oppenheimer*. The book, to be truthful, is variable in quality but there are some wonderful reflections and powerful and striking images along the way. Many of the sermons remind the reader about the dangers of the human desire to be in control and to assert power over the planet and others with all of the destructive consequences which this brings. Koyama's most famous insight is that Christians need to learn to walk at the speed at which God walks, refusing to be a people who are hurried. And what speed does God walk at? God walks at the speed of the incarnation. God becomes human in Jesus so God walks at the speed at which a human being walks – on average, 3 miles an hour, the title of his book. This is not a manifesto for indolence or a lack of urgency but a plea to let go and let God, to forsake control, and to take time to notice (God, self, others, creation).

The beginning of a new Methodist year seems a strange time to encourage a people who are less hurried. We are launched almost immediately on 1st September into a round of meetings and tasks which sometimes can seem unending. Of course, we cannot undo all of the tasks that face us. But we can change how we approach them and what animates them – how we walk in the midst of our work. I am re-reading the Gospel of Mark in advance of the new cycle of lectionary readings later this year. Jesus is never without the busyness and business of ministry. Even when he goes – deliberately it should be noticed – alone to pray, he is soon surrounded by the crowd or by the disciples eager to pull him straight back into the work. That sounds familiar. Yet the very purposefulness of setting aside time to pray and focus on God is reflected in the way in which he then walks amongst and notices others. If this is something we observe in the ministry of Jesus, then surely it is something we should aspire to as well. A NHS Chaplain once said to me, 'I am the only person in the hospital who has been given permission to go slow.' He wasn't saying that he had nothing to do! He was talking about an attitude and approach which animated everything he did. He was able to notice and noticing and responding is itself an act of love.

I wish you every blessing as you begin the new Methodist year. I pray that we might all walk it at the speed at which God walks.

Yours in Christ,

Richard Andrew

District Chair