

Today, we gather for our Annual District Church Meeting — a moment to pause, look back with gratitude, and look forward with faith.

Our readings today bring us two powerful moments of change in the life of God's people.

In Acts, Peter is challenged: "Why did you go to them?"

It wasn't easy.

The other leaders challenged him.

But Peter didn't act out of impulse or preference.

Peter had heard God's voice.

Peter explains — God gave me a vision. God showed me that the old dividing lines no longer stood. God was doing a new thing.

Growing Together in Love and Courage

Peter had seen God at work in new and unexpected places.

And the church faced a hard truth: if they were going to follow God's Spirit, they had to let go of old ways of thinking, of safe familiar boundaries, and step forward in trust.

And when Peter shared the story of what God had done, the church fell silent.....  
and then broke out in praise:

*"Then God has given even to the Gentiles the repentance that leads to life!"* (Acts 11:18)

What I noticed when reading the passage from Acts was that Peter's obedience led the church into a bigger, richer, riskier future.

A future where God's mission was no longer confined to old expectations.

And this took courage.

It took trust.

It took the willingness to say: "God is ahead of us — will we follow?"

Then we hear Jesus in John 13, speaking words of love at the Last Supper.

Judas has just gone out into the night. The cross is close.

"I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another."

This command isn't a warm fluffy command to love, it is not a love based on comfort.

Not a love that clings to the familiar.

Jesus does not avoid the hard road ahead. He moves towards it in love, trusting that on the other side of the cross is resurrection.

New life. A new beginning.

Jesus speaks into a Christ-shaped love — willing to serve, stretch, and sacrifice.

Sister's and brother's, today we are standing at a similar crossroads.

The Spirit is stirring.

New things are happening -

- New ministries are being planted
- New people are being raised up.
- New partnerships across Redditch Mission Area are emerging.
- A Children and Families Worker is coming.
- And new foundations are being laid for a healthier, more sustainable church for the future.

This has been a year of courage, creativity, and collaboration.

I want to say a heartfelt thank you for all the unseen hours, the prayers, the conversations, the cups of tea, the ideas offered, and the risks taken.

But we also know there are things we must now let go of.

- Some of the old ways of doing things.
- Expectations that no longer fit a new season.

- Familiar patterns that once gave comfort, but which may not carry us into God's future.

Letting go is hard. It feels like loss.

We should name that honestly.

But — in the light of Easter — we know that in every ending, God is already preparing a new beginning.

In the resurrection, death is not the last word.

In the resurrection, what seems like an end becomes the seedbed of new life.

In resurrection, like with Peter — we are being called to step forward.

We are being asked to trust that God's mission is bigger than our comfort zones.

We are being asked to love not only in words but in acts of commitment and courage.

The truth is:

- We cannot sustain our ministry on goodwill alone.
- We need people to step up into training.
- We need ALM Worship Leaders.
- We need ALMs in Children and Families Ministry.
- We need future LLMs (Licensed Lay Ministers).
- We need teams who say, "Here I am — send me."

We cannot build a church that reaches new generations unless we are willing to invest in leadership, to risk change, and to trust that the Spirit is ahead of us — just as the Spirit led Peter into new, uncomfortable places that became new life for the Church.

So today, I ask you:

- Can we trust that God is ahead of us?
- Can we let go of what we must, not with bitterness or regret, but with hope and open hands?
- Can we step forward in love, as Jesus commanded — not clinging to the past, but building a future shaped by the Spirit?

Because the Spirit who spoke to Peter...

The Christ who rose from the tomb...

Is the same Spirit breathing among us here today.

Creating and embracing new won't happen by accident.

It will take commitment.

It will take generosity.

It will take each one of us asking, not just "What can the church do for me?" — but "How can I be the church for others?"

Because — as Jesus says —

"By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."

Just like when Jesus first said these words, he knew the cross was going to happen, but he looked beyond that to an empty tomb.

This is not the end of anything.

This is the beginning of something new.

Growing Together in Love and Courage

It's not just about survival — it's about transformation.

It's not about losing — it's about growing into who God is calling us to be.

Let's be a church that says "yes" to God's bigger, riskier, richer vision.

Let's be a church that loves boldly.

May we let go with trust.

May we step forward with courage.

And may we love one another — as Christ has loved us.

Amen.