

# Giants

At Priesthill URC there was an ongoing debate over the padlock, which we use to secure the huge metal gates at the entrance of the church grounds. It was really difficult to open because of its position and often froze during the winter months (in Glasgow any month other than June!) requiring a can of WD 40 to defrost it. It was suggested that perhaps we could use a chain and even larger padlock, but that idea was discarded in a fashion which probably contravened the Basis of Union.



One clear bright day as I opened the said gates, I couldn't help but notice how inviting the grounds looked. The sun was shining through the leaves of the trees into the Woodland garden - one of the two community garden spaces in the church area. What a shame that the iron gates blocked this view, I thought. So, there was a further discussion about the gates. Much fear was expressed about potential vandalism, damage and for what purpose and by whom the gardens maybe used when the building was unoccupied, and the gates were left open.

Despite all the anxiety, the congregation took, what felt like, the brave decision to leave the gates unlocked and open - initially for a trial period.....

This experience made me realise how often fear - or our perception of the unknown and danger prevents us, as individual Christians and as congregations reaching out to and engaging with our neighbours and communities. It sometimes prevents us claiming what God has in store for us.

In the Hebrew Scriptures there is the account of the Israelites reaching the border of the Promised Land. They send 12 spies into the land who all return with tales of a place flowing with milk and honey. However, ten of them claim that the inhabitants are giants and there is no way they can take over the land. Only two see things very differently but they are ignored, and the Israelites spend years wandering about in the wilderness. It is only when they return to the border 40 years later, that they realise the perception of the ten spies had been wrong and Joshua and Caleb had been correct all along. They are told by a local woman, Rahab, that the inhabitants had, in fact, been afraid of the Israelites because they had heard of their powerful God.

Meanwhile back at Priesthill URC, it's been over a year since the decision to leave open the gates was taken. There's been a couple of 'incidents' during the recent long school summer holidays when boredom has kicked in - but nothing particularly dramatic. We have been aware that sometimes groups of local people, particularly young people use the Woodland garden as a place to gather and the car park as a football pitch especially when the building is not being used. The positive aspect of their ongoing presence is that they all have developed a sense of ownership of the grounds and, in reality, protect the church from vandalism.

And maybe we have begun to learn that some of our fears are unfounded, that we could step out with faith and compassion.....and that we don't live in a land of giants after all.