

Sermon 5 July - The Importance of Community

INTRO

Our reading is from Paul's letter to the Thessalonians.

You can read about the founding of the church in Thessalonica in Acts 17.

The church did not have an easy start because people who were threatened by the gospel message started a riot and Paul had to flee.

Paul's Pastor heart was concerned for them.

He would go on to Berea and the trouble-makers followed him there.

So Paul went on to Athens but he had the Thessalonians on his mind and so he sent Timothy back to see how they were doing...

Timothy eventually caught up to Paul in Corinth where Paul wrote this letter, which we think is the first of Paul's letters to churches.

As we read it, please note how Paul:

1. Wants to strengthen and encourage them
2. Is concerned about the dangers of hardship
3. Is overjoyed at their progress and affection
4. And how he is encouraged...

READING

So when we could stand it no longer, and we thought it best to be left by ourselves in Athens, we sent Timothy, who is our brother and God's fellow worker in spreading the gospel of Christ, to strengthen and encourage you in your faith, so that no one would be unsettled by these trials. You know quite well that we were destined for them. In fact, when we were with you, we kept telling you that we would be persecuted. And it turned out that way, as you well know.

For this reason, when I could stand it no longer, I sent to find out about your faith. I was afraid that in some way the tempter might have tempted you and our efforts might have been useless.... **But** Timothy has just now come to us from you and has brought good news about your faith and love. He has told us that you always have pleasant memories of us and that you long to see us, just as we also long to see you. Therefore, brothers and sisters, in all our distress and persecution we were encouraged about you because of your faith. For now we really live, since you are standing firm in the Lord.

Introduction

“now we really live, since you are standing firm in the Lord.”

My children’s address says it all:

I want to talk about the importance of fellowship -

Which might sound ironic as we haven’t opened the church...

But the early church experienced fellowship under the circumstances of persecution even when Paul was travelling and in prison.

If I look at Paul’s life fellowship was:

- A priority
- A longing
- A blessing
- Something he did creatively

The personal touch Paul put to his letters...

Memorising Wrong

Heb 10:25 Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another--and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

Getting into the habit of **neglecting** fellowship...

What are the key elements of Fellowship?

1. **It Strengthens us.**

The Greek word Paul uses for Strengthen is *sterizo* which means to strengthen or buttress.

For encourage he uses *parakaleo* - “walk alongside calling”
Iron sharpens iron – Prov 27:17

2. **Protects us in tough times...**

Sadly we “cocoon” in tough times...

3. **We can be inspired by growth in others.** Paul is inspired by them...

4. **And we can really be encouraged.** It really does lift our souls...

Conclusion: Fellowship Matters

On Trinity Sunday we considered that God is Trinity – a community

We are created in His image – for community – not lone ranger Christians.

Now in these crazy times we need to prioritise community.

- Worship,
- Fellowship Groups on Zoom and even one on whatsapp.
- Connecting – Strengthen, Encourage, Protect, Inspire.

The danger is to cocoon – but now is not the time to do that

REACH OUT