

Aughnacloy, Ballymagrane, Clogherney & Sixmilecross Presbyterian Churches

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Dear Friends

As your minister, it is a great privilege that I have in bringing this weekly devotion to you. As we are reminded of God's word we have help for these days which for us all are different from what we are accustomed. Romans 8:26-28 *In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express. 27 And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God's will. 28 And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.*

I trust that you are all keeping safe and well in these present times of uncertainty. While the routines of Lockdown, social distancing, self-isolation and shielding may for some be wearisome, may God's word be an encouragement to us all as we reflect on the encouragement Paul has for us as we return to 1 Thessalonians and chapter 3 and look to the future Glory.

1 Thessalonians 3:1 So when we could stand it no longer, we thought it best to be left by ourselves in Athens. 2 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, 3 so that no-one would be unsettled by these trials. You know quite well that we were destined for them. 4 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. 5 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. 6 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. 7 Therefore, brothers, in all our distress and persecution we were encouraged about you because of your faith. 8 For now we really live, since you are standing firm in the Lord. 9 How can we thank God enough for you in return for all the joy we have in the presence of our God because of you? 10 Night and day we pray most earnestly that we may see you again and supply what is lacking in your faith. 11 Now may our God and Father himself and our Lord Jesus clear the way for us to come to you. 12 May the Lord make your love increase and overflow for each other and for everyone else, just as ours does for you. 13 May he strengthen your hearts so

that you will be blameless and holy in the presence of our God and Father when our Lord Jesus comes with all his holy ones.

What oxygen is to the body, encouragement is to the soul? We all need some encouragement from time to time! there have been at least two wonderful news stories to encourage us this week. There is Captain Tom Moore the WW11 veteran raising millions of pounds for NHS charities, and Connie Titchen at the grand age of 106 the UK's oldest coronavirus survivor leaving hospital fit and well and there are many others that would encourage us at present also.

Today I ask, Are you an encourager? It takes courage to encourage. Paul was an encourager in our text today. In this passage we see a number of statements that Paul made to encourage these struggling believers.

Paul knew these believers were facing trials. He wrote in verses 2-3: *"...to strengthen and encourage you in your faith, so that no one would be unsettled by these trials."* Life is full of trials and tribulations. As Christians we aren't exempt from trouble. In fact, Paul had predicted these believers would be persecuted. When people go through tough times, God wants us to come alongside them to encourage them.

It's a bit like when your car battery is flat, there isn't a kick in it at all. You bring another car alongside and connect up the jump leads, and it is like one car encouraging the other to fire up first time and you're on your way. That's what encouragement is. It's when you use your words like emotional jump leads to give energy and strength to someone whose battery has lost its spark. Paul wrote that he was concerned the tempter would influence the believers in Thessalonica. The last time we were in the Meeting House together we learned in chapter two that the devil wants to try to stop you having fellowship with God. He wants for you to give up and give in when things get tough. Will you have the courage to encourage?

You May feel Isolated! One of the best ways to encourage someone is to tell him or her you are thankful and appreciate them, especially in this time of social isolation and shielding. Paul modelled this encouragement when he wrote in verse 9: *"How can we thank God enough for you in return for all the joy we have in the presence of our God because of you?"* Sometimes we can feel alone and unappreciated. Let us keep in touch better. It's a good thing to express thanks to people when good things happen. Presently there are many people who may feel isolated and unappreciated, and they need your encouragement in these times.

Pray For People! Paul, also encouraged them by telling them he was praying for them. Verse 10: *"Night and day we pray most earnestly that we may see you again and supply what is lacking in your faith."* Paul not only told them he was praying for them, he even wrote out the content of the prayer he was making on their behalf. It's a great prayer and it's one you and I can pray for others. *1 Thessalonians 3:11-13 "Now may our God and Father himself and our Lord Jesus clear the way for us to come to you. May the Lord make your love increase and overflow for each other and for*

everyone else, just as ours does for you. May he strengthen your hearts so that you will be blameless and holy in the presence of our God and Father when our Lord Jesus comes with all his holy ones."

Notice the three things he asked God for in this prayer.

Ask the Lord to fill you with His love! The mark of a true disciple isn't a big Bible or a cross around the neck. Jesus said the world would recognize His disciples by our love. Remember, these Christians were being persecuted. Paul was praying that they would love their enemies as much as they would love one another.

Ask the Lord to strengthen your heart! In the struggles of life we sometimes get weak and weary. We aren't so much physically tired as we are emotionally drained. That's why it's important for us to pray for God to strengthen the hearts of people who are hurting.

Ask the Lord to make you ready for His return! The theme of this letter is the return of Jesus. The most vivid description of the return of Christ in the Bible is in the next. Paul expected Jesus to return in his lifetime. Are you ready for the return of Jesus? We should pray for one another. Let someone know that you are praying for them.

For anyone it is great to know someone is thinking about us and taking time to encouraging us in way, but also let them know it is appreciated so they too can enjoy the blessing.

Encouragement is a little like a boomerang, you give it away and it soon comes back to you. Let us all be encouragers and refrain for throwing crooked sticks which only cause hurt and disillusionment. If you want to BE encouraged, then you must BE an encourager. Jesus reminds us in: *Luke 6:38 Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you."*

As we worship may we commit ourselves to be an encourager. Sometimes, all people need is a single word of encouragement. Be encouraged with Paul's prayer of v 11-13, as we look to the future, not one of us can tell when the Lord will call for us. May I encourage you to trust Jesus now and be ready for His call when it comes, whether soon or far into the future, be ready, trust Jesus today?

Not just because of Coronavirus and the fear it has placed in the hearts of many people, but because God loves you the way you are, come to Him today and know your destiny for eternity, it is secure in His hands.

Let us Pray

Loving Lord, we thank you for your everlasting love for all of your creation. We ask that people may have that courage to turn their life over to God and know His everlasting love and commitment, which enables all who trust to stand firm in the face of adversity.

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all this day and forevermore? Amen.