



ST CHRISTOPHER'S 'SUSPENDED CHURCH' NEWSLETTER

Sunday 21st February 2021

NEWS UPDATE



Malcolm's Retirement as Treasurer



Malcolm Dove has indicated that he will be stepping down as church treasurer at the forthcoming AGM on Sunday 25th April. Malcolm has served as the church treasurer for many years, and his contribution to the life of our church cannot be over-stated. We are extremely grateful for all that he has given.

I am mentioning this in good time – nine weeks before our AGM date – because finding a replacement treasurer is not something that should be left to the last minute. I would ask you to begin praying now for the right person to take over this important role. And if this is something that you yourself would consider, then get in touch and we can discuss what is involved. I promise that an enquiry conversation will not be taken as an indication of commitment! Malcolm has also indicated that he will help guide a new treasurer through a handover period after the AGM.

BIBLE READING – Philippians 2: 19-30

I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you soon, that I also may be cheered when I receive news about you. I have no one else like him, who will show genuine concern for your welfare. For everyone looks out for their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ. But you know that Timothy has proved himself, because as a son with his father he has served with me in the work of the gospel. I hope, therefore, to send him as soon as I see how things go with me. And I am confident in the Lord that I myself will come soon.

But I think it is necessary to send back to you Epaphroditus, my brother, co-worker and fellow soldier, who is also your messenger, whom you sent to take care of my needs. For he longs for all of you and is distressed because you heard he was ill. Indeed, he was ill, and almost died. But God had mercy on him, and not on him only but also on me, to spare me sorrow upon sorrow. Therefore, I am all the more eager to send him, so that when you see him again you may be glad and I may have less anxiety. So then, welcome him in the Lord with great joy, and honour people like him, because he almost died for the work of Christ. He risked his life to make up for the help you yourselves could not give me.



THIS WEEK'S MESSAGE – written by Joyce Willacy

Appreciating Special People

St Paul's Unsung Heroes

If you were to ask me to name a biblical hero, I'd probably come up with Abraham or David, Moses or Elijah. Whereas Paul gives us names like Onesiphorous (in 2 Timothy) or Archippus (in Philemon) – people I've never even heard of! Paul likes to celebrate what one theologian describes as 'the fingers and toes and knuckles and elbows of the body of Christ – those parts of the body that rarely draw attention to themselves, that rarely stand out and gain notice, but without which the body couldn't function at all'. And today, he brings us two more such essential body parts: Timothy and Epaphroditus.



Paul began this chapter of his letter to the Philippians with some of the deepest teaching of the Bible on how we should try to live our lives. Now, he gives us two living, breathing examples of ordinary people, who were living out his theology.

Timothy

Paul was concerned about the Philippians, the church he'd founded and cared about. He wanted to know how they were getting on, but he was under house arrest in Rome. So, he sent the next best thing: his beloved Timothy.

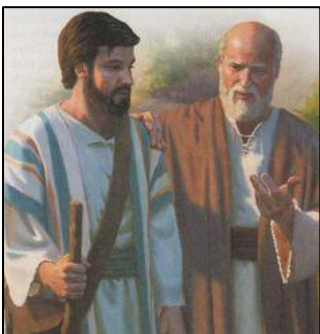
Paul describes three ways in which Timothy is living out his earlier teaching:

1) He cares for people.

He genuinely is '*interested in others*' instead of '*thinking only about his own affairs*' (v4).

2) He lives sacrificially.

Unlike others, he doesn't '*care only for himself and not for what matters to Jesus Christ*' (v21). Not only



does Timothy put others before himself but, more importantly, he puts Christ before himself. And he shows that caring for others really is serving Christ.

'Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me' (Matthew 25:35-40).

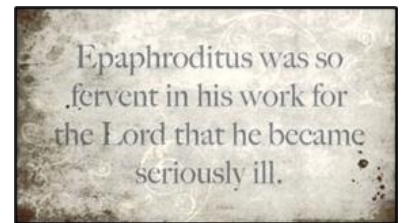
3) Timothy has proved himself over an extended period of time.

Throughout the ten years they've been together, Timothy has proved himself to be faithful, reliable and trustworthy. Paul describes him as a kindred spirit, literally 'equal-souled' or 'one-souled', with no agenda other than the interests of Christ – even when it cost him. He is a shining example of Paul's teaching of someone who lives like Jesus Christ.

Epaphroditus

Then Paul gives us Epaphroditus – evidently, someone the Philippians had confidence in because they’d enlisted him to help Paul out by taking him financial support, sending him over 700 miles – a long way to travel even by car today, but imagine back then! Notice the four labels Paul gives him:

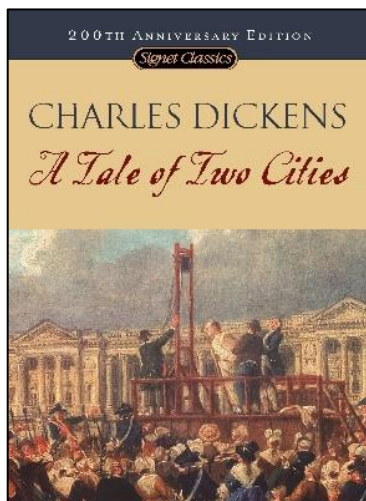
- *Brother* – again, there is clearly a close bond of fellowship between them.
- *Co-worker* – like Timothy, Epaphroditus works shoulder-to-shoulder with Paul to extend the gospel and can be trusted and depended upon to complete a task.
- *Fellow soldier* – Epaphroditus fought alongside Paul against the spiritual forces of darkness. He has his back and is willing to sacrifice everything to make ministry happen. Paul recognises him as a fighter!
- *Messenger* – Coming to see Paul in prison had been in itself dangerous and Epaphroditus had almost died in the process. Paul goes so far as to describe him as ‘risking his life’ for the cause of Christ, the Greek word recognising that he had quite literally and voluntarily put himself in harm’s way.



Bible scholars point out that each word in the original Greek is progressively deeper in meaning than the one before it, suggesting that Paul shows real intention in his choice of words here.

Taking some risks for God

Interestingly, the name, Epaphroditus, comes from *Aphrodite*, the Greek goddess of love. But she was also the goddess of gamblers: it was the custom in those days to throw the dice and shout, “*Epaphroditos!*” Soon after New Testament times, a group of Christians joined together in an association they called ‘the Gamblers’, based on the Greek word for risking found here. With Epaphroditus as their model, they risked their lives by visiting prisoners in jail and ministering to the sick, especially those with dangerous diseases that no one else would help, boldly proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ wherever they went. I’m not suggesting that we should behave in a way that risks spreading the virus, but do we take any risks at all in our ministry?



We are currently living in totally unprecedented times. And somehow those familiar words of Charles Dickens might seem appropriate: ‘It was the best of times, it was the worst of times.’ For it would be a mistake to see only one side of what’s happening.

Dickens goes on to say: ‘It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair, we had everything before us, we had nothing.

On the one hand, we mustn't deny reality; we must see it for what it is – with all its negatives and dangers – and prepare accordingly. But on the other hand, we must not lose sight of the *opportunities* that the current situation presents.

COVID-19 has raised the question of what it means for us to *be* church (the body of Christ) without *going to* church (an actual building for worship). Going forward, as we start to gather again physically, in addition to fostering real-life relationships we need to also find real ways of connecting with those unable to attend in person, using the opportunities that technology allows. Timothy and Epaphroditus show us the importance of friendships and genuine, caring relationships. Our Tuesday night Zoom prayer meeting is I think an example of this. Not only is it an opportunity to pray together: for those known to us that need our prayers, for our communities and the needs of the world, and for one another. But also, being able to 'touch' one another virtually has enabled relationships to deepen and trust to grow in a meaningful way, establishing a real bond and sense of community.



I suspect that it will be a long time before things return to normal. And we can't simply put our mission on hold. The dramatic changes happening in the world have caused some people to ask questions they never asked before – and they want to know what the Bible has to say about it. There are opportunities for us to preach the gospel. Especially in this season of Lent, we must find new ways to somehow serve and connect, not only with each other, but with our communities, to work out how we might become networks of compassion, healing and support in the face of sickness and fear, pain and loss. It really is a new season with new challenges and so many opportunities.

Ordinary people making a difference

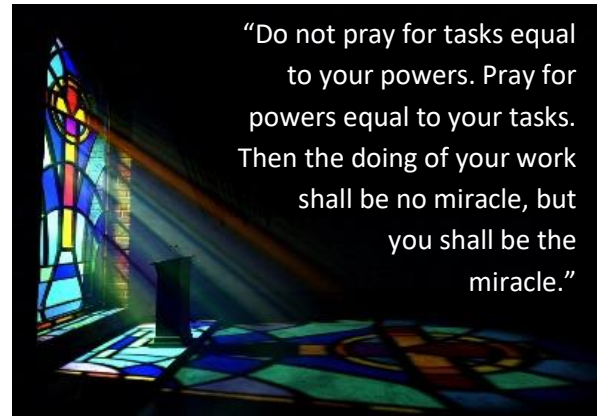
Timothy and Epaphroditus were just average, ordinary people, yet they made a difference. I say 'just' – and yet it's not 'just'. Because, when I think about the people who've made an impact on my own life, it is those 'ordinary' people who make a difference. God uses ordinary people – the clay jars that we are. Ordinary people, who are willing to love and give themselves to others, who dare to be real and to risk themselves. Ordinary people – but who follow, and put into practice, the example of Jesus Christ.



The other day, I came across the question: What do you want to do with your one and only life? It's easy to develop the illusion that we have unlimited time, and that a wasted day – even a wasted year – is no big deal. But God has only given us a short time. And he has a purpose for each of our lives. We were meant to make a difference, made to leave a legacy.

One of my favourite quotes is from clergyman, Phillips Brooks: “Do not pray for tasks equal to your powers. Pray for powers equal to your tasks. Then the doing of your work shall be no miracle, but you shall be the miracle.”

Like Timothy and Epaphroditus, if we do our best to have the same attitude as Christ Jesus and put our faith and trust in Jesus into action in our daily lives, then we can be ordinary – but special – people, who do extraordinary things for God.



Prayers – Written by Dawn Edwards

Everlasting God, your son Jesus Christ was tried and tempted by the devil.
May we not be ashamed of temptation but saved from the weakness of giving in.
Help us choose the way of faithfulness rather than popularity,
service rather than fame, and sacrifice rather than power.

Lord in your mercy:

Hear our prayer.

God of love, we thank You for the special people in our lives who we appreciate with all our hearts
and the unconditional love they give.

We thank You for our family and friends who understand our actions,
who support us in our decisions,
and whose presence can lift the burden of a thorny day.

Help me with those who are difficult to love.
When people come at me with criticism and wild expectations,
when they ignore me or try to bend me to their will,
let me recognize their flaws and their dangers,
but then let me remember your attitude towards them,
and lead me to see them in the light of Your love.

Lord in your mercy:

Hear our prayer.

Gracious God, we pray for the whole family of your church here in Lea.

May all your people be built up in faith and demonstrate in their lives the gospel of Jesus Christ,
especially as at this time we are struggling to meet together because of the pandemic.

Help us to play our part in the life of the church throughout the world, through our prayers and by our gifts
of money and service during this season of Lent and beyond.

Give courage to those who find it hard to follow you. Give us a fresh vision that leads to action and strengthen us to serve you in the places where we live.

Lord in your mercy:

Hear our prayer.

Creator God, we pray for those in positions of authority and leadership;
that they do not misuse their powers but respect and care for all their peoples
and for the natural resources of their countries.

During our Lenten fasting may we be constantly aware of those in our world who are always hungry and thirsty and of all those who have so little when we have so much.

Lord in your mercy:

Hear our prayer.

Loving God, we pray for those who are ill and in pain, longing to live full lives,
for those who are sad and hurt longing for comfort, for those in hospital awaiting treatment,
for those convalescing, seeing an end to their suffering and for those whose only relief
will come through death.

May we always offer gentle support to those in trouble sensitive encouragement to those in need,
and strength and support to those in weakness.

We especially pray for any suffering from Coronavirus.

Lord in your mercy:

Hear our prayer.

Merciful God, we pray for those saddened by the death of someone close to them.
Give them your comfort as they mourn for their loved ones and turn their darkness into light.
We commend to your everlasting love and care those who have died
praying that will rest eternal in the light of Christ.

Lord in your mercy:

Hear our prayer.

Gracious God, help us to see this time of Lent as an opportunity
to develop our discipleship and discipline and as your Son Jesus showed us how to reject temptation,
fill us with grace to be faithful to his example in this Lenten season.
You made us in your image to be your people, wherever we go.

Merciful Father; **accept these prayers for the sake of your Son our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.**

