

## A Word in Season

“Hiya John!” enthused my friend Trudy, just back from church, as she bounded up the stairs and into our boys’ flat. “I know you’ve been down lately, but I felt I had to come and tell you what Rev. John preached on tonight. Listen to this...”

We were both final year students, vulnerable young Christians learning to make sense of the world. Like me, Trudy had had her fair share of knocks, disappointments and relationship problems. Yet through it all, we were both learning to place our trust in Jesus as our Good Shepherd.

Trudy opened her bible and read some words written by St. Paul to one of his churches which was suffering persecution.

*“Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God.”* [2 Corinthians 1 vs 3,4]

She’d found great comfort in comparing herself with these believers going through hard times. Verses 5 and 6 which follow, tell of how they learnt to persevere and break through to a triumphant hope.

And now Trudy wanted to comfort *me*. We weren’t attached, yet I’d mattered enough to her that she’d made a special journey just to encourage me. And she did. I felt that God believed I was worth it.

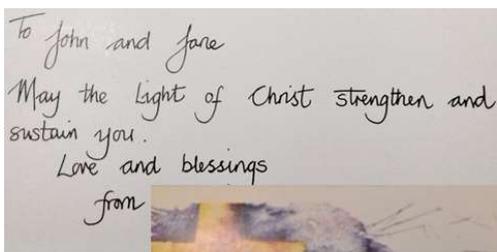
What, I wonder, would Paul have said to us had he been around during the Coronavirus outbreak? The early church must have lived under the constant threat of opposition from militant Jews, from idol worshippers who believed the Gospel could ruin their livelihood, and from those who spread vicious rumours about them. Besides expressing God’s comfort, Paul told them to live as if Jesus was returning very soon. One of his instructions was,

*“Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing.”* [1 Thessalonians 5 vs 11]

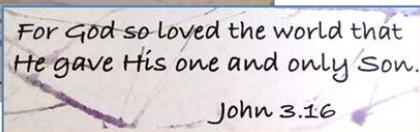
There must have been times when, like us today, it was difficult to meet openly. So, how are we meant to ‘build each another up’? Unlike the early church, we can’t creep silently into underground cellars to meet. But we can phone each other, send post, and chat via email or social media. I’m thrilled we can enjoy our very own Sunday service and Lent Course despite the lockdown.

So...I’ve made a promise to God. Every day I’m going to ask Him to nudge me to contact one other person, to encourage them. I know that, for me to be encouraging, I need to spend time with Him. Normally this means doing a short bible study and spending time in prayer. I’m having to learn (again!) to include a time of silence, asking Him to give me something special to share. It can be exciting when the other person tells you you’ve hit the exact spot!

As I was crafting this article, I asked God for another specific example of a word that had encouraged me. Next morning, a card came through our door from two old friends. Barbara prints cards, designing the artwork herself. Imagine how it warmed our hearts!



To John and Jane  
May the light of Christ strengthen and  
sustain you.  
Love and blessings  
from



For God so loved the world that  
He gave His one and only Son.  
John 3.16

So, if the phone rings or an email pings and it’s me, then you’d better watch out...but will you join me in the Encouragement business? I’ll be equally delighted if *you* ring or ping *me*!

John Hearson