

## Pastoral letter from Sue Stanworth, Local Preacher

Dear sisters and brothers,

By the time you read this letter, in Sheffield, we shall probably be turning back the clocks and moving into Tier 3 Covid restrictions. How are you doing? How are you feeling?

I'll be honest, I've been feeling spiritually adrift since lockdown in March. I've really missed meeting together in worship, and I've missed the joy and the discipline of preaching. These are painful and difficult times.

My life-raft has been our weekly prayer Zoom meetings and Rev. Sally's pastoral letter.

How are you managing to keep your head above water? Take some time now to think about this..... Maybe write it down. Who has helped and what has helped? Remember that we all struggle.

I've been surprised at the conversations I've had with total strangers, socially distanced and mask wearing of course. Yesterday I met an elderly couple walking their elderly dog in the rain in Hillsborough Park, (while John was picking up autumn leaves with the grandchildren!), sharing the deep joys and sorrows of long lives with me and giving heartfelt thanks for our wonderful health service and the benefits of keeping on walking

But I have really missed meeting and preaching. So last week I heard the beginning of Paul's pastoral letter to the newly founded church in Thessalonica and I was suddenly thrown a life-line! I knew that I may not be able to preach as we used to, but I could write a pastoral letter. Rev Sally has encouraged me to pick up the baton and run with it!

Forgive me for starting with a reading from last week's lectionary. You might be in need of a life line too:

"I, Paul, together here with Silas and Timothy, send greetings to the church at Thessalonica, Christians assembled by God the Father and by the Master, Jesus Christ. God's amazing grace be with you! God's robust peace!

Every time we think of you, we thank God for you. Day and night you're in our prayers as we call to mind your work of faith, your labour of love, and your patience of hope in following our Master, Jesus Christ, before God our Father.

It is clear to us, friends, that God not only loves you very much but also has put his hand on you for something special. When the Message we preached came to you, it wasn't just words. Something happened in you. The Holy Spirit put steel in your convictions. You paid careful attention to the way we lived among you, and determined to live that way yourselves. In imitating us, you imitated the Master. Although great trouble accompanied the Word, you were able to take great joy from the Holy Spirit! - taking the trouble with the joy, the joy with the trouble.

Do you know that all over the provinces of both Macedonia and Achaia believers look up to you? The word has got round. Your lives are echoing the Master's Word, not only in the provinces but all over the place. The news of your faith in God is out. We don't even have to say anything any more- you're the message! People come up and tell us how you received us with open arms, how you deserted the dead idols of your old life so you could embrace and serve God, the true God. They marvel at how expectantly you await the arrival of his Son, whom he raised from the dead - Jesus, who rescued us from certain doom.

1 Thessalonians, verses 1 to 10. "The Message"

Paul was a great encourager, wasn't he? I particularly loved the translation of verse 5:

"The Holy Spirit put steel in your convictions."

And it's the Holy Spirit who puts steel into our convictions too!

I pray that you will find something to challenge you or to comfort you in this passage of Scripture. Do let me know and please don't suffer in silence. I am happy to listen if you would like to talk.

If you would like to sing a hymn to remind yourself how much God loves you, may I recommend no 482 from "Singing the Faith". It goes well to the tune of Amazing Grace!

"There is no moment of my life, no place where I might go,  
No action which God does not see, no thought God does not know.

Before I speak, my words are known, and all that I decide,  
to come or go: God knows my choice, and waits to be my guide.

If I should close my eyes to God, then I am given sight;  
if I should go where all is dark, my darkness is made light.

God knew my days before all days, before I came to be;  
And keeps me, loves me, in my ways, through all eternity."

Brian Foley. (1919-2000)

Our Methodist prayer for Sunday 25th October:

"Eternal God, giver of love and peace  
You call your children to live together as one family.  
Give us grace to learn your ways  
And to do your will,  
that we may bring justice and peace to all people,  
in the name of Jesus Christ. **Amen.**

**With every blessing,**

**Sue Stanworth**  
Local Preacher

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