

Footsteps of Paul #2 – Sunday, August 15, 2021  
Katie Sayre Preaching

**Kalimera Zen-na Ee-pee-lee** (Good Morning, Again, Friends)

For those who don't know me or are visiting for the first time here, my name is Katie Sayre and I am an Ordained Elder here at Valley Presbyterian Church. This past June, Pastor Diane and I were fortunate to have the opportunity to spend 18 days on a tour with Footsteps Ministries in Greece. Thank you all for being here today to share in this second message about Following the Footsteps of Paul through Greece. As Diane noted last week, I won't be speaking directly about highlights of our trip, but rather about the spiritual power we gained through study of Paul in the deeper context of Greece. If you are interested in more detail, our 4-week class about our trip including pictures, stories, devotions and food begins on Wednesday September 15<sup>th</sup> at 1pm in the Spiritual Life Center. We hope you will join us.

So, let's continue our journey with Paul. Last week, Diane preached on Unity and the important work that Paul did to start the early Christian church with faith and purpose. Paul was a Jew, a Pharisee, and a Roman citizen who pursued and persecuted Jesus until he "saw the light" on the road to Damascus. From his past, Paul clearly knew and loved the Old Testament, but throughout his ministry, Paul didn't focus solely on scripture and fulfillment of the prophecies. Nor did he bring attention to himself unless it was to speak of God's love for him. What Paul really focused on was Jesus and how to be a follower of Jesus. He used scripture to support his message that Jesus **was** the Messiah.

Today, I'm going to talk about *three different aspects of encouragement*: encouraging ourselves, encouraging others and then encouraging those who minister to all of us. Let's start with a word of prayer...

**“Oh, most Gracious and loving God, thank you for this opportunity to be together in fellowship this morning. Open our minds and hearts to your love and encouragement. May my thoughts and words bring a better understanding of the work of your servant Paul and help us to be better encouragers in this world today. Amen”**

So, Paul was an “urban evangelist” as it were – he moved from city to city to preach using whatever means he felt the people would best relate to: culture, art, theology and even sports in order to deliver his message, *unify* the faith and strengthen the early church. Jesus, in contrast, was more of a “rural evangelist” roaming the countryside and teaching using parables of birds, seedlings, weddings and flowers. More often than not, Paul’s message was met by derision, challenges or outright violence from his fellow Jews and the Greeks.

Our first scripture passage today takes place after Paul has had to move from Thessalonica to Berea to Athens and finally arrives in Corinth to continue preaching the message of Jesus. Listen to Luke’s account of this in **Acts 18: verses 1-11...**

**“After this, Paul left Athens and went to Corinth. There he met a Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, who had recently come from Italy with his wife, Priscilla, because Claudius had ordered all Jews to leave Rome. Paul went to see them, and because he was a tentmaker as they were, he stayed and worked with them. Every Sabbath he reasoned in the synagogue, trying to persuade Jews and Greeks.**

**When Silas and Timothy came from Macedonia, Paul devoted himself exclusively to preaching, testifying to the Jews that**

**Jesus was the Messiah. But when they opposed Paul and became abusive, he shook out his clothes in protest and said to them, “your blood be on your own heads! I am innocent of it. From now on I will go to the Gentiles.”**

**Then Paul left the synagogue and went next door to the house of Titius Justus, a worshiper of God. Crispus, the synagogue leader, and his entire household believed in the Lord; and many of the Corinthians who heard Paul believed and were baptized.**

**One night the Lord spoke to Paul in a vision: “Do not be afraid; keep on speaking, do not be silent. For I am with you, and no one is going to attack and harm you, because I have many people in this city.” So, Paul stayed in Corinth for a year and a half, teaching them the word of God.”**

**The word of the Lord...(thanks be to God)**

So, Paul had taken hit after hit (sometimes literally) and been chased out of cities by his fellow Jews as being a rabble rouser. He had to wonder about the challenge that God had put before him. Was he discouraged? Would you be discouraged if you were Paul? Probably, but the Lord came to him at this critical time **to give him courage** and strength to keep speaking, keep preaching and spreading the message of Jesus to everyone – Jew and Gentile alike. As David Sparks, our trip leader, noted, it had to really gall the Jewish leaders that Paul **did** continue to preach for a year and a half in a synagogue led by Crispus that was right next door! **But the Lord was with Paul!** He was strengthened and encouraged by his faith in the Lord and continued to convert believers to Jesus - right under the noses of the original synagogue leaders.

The Meaning of Encouragement

So, what does it mean to encourage or receive encouragement?

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The root of the word encouragement is courage from the French ‘coeur’ or heart. (Which, as we learned on our trip that every word actually “**comes from the Greek**” meaning heart – just a little Greek joke). Therefore, courage means to “give heart” or the quality of heart or spirit that enables one to face difficulty, pain, or danger without fear. Encouragement, then, is to support one another in having the courage or heart to face what we fear or know to be difficult.

Personal Encouragement

So, let’s begin with personal encouragement. We all have doubts and can get discouraged. The world right now can be a place of negativity, cynicism, and heartache. How do we cope with this day in and day out? Can we encourage **ourselves** without the input of others? I would argue that this is truly a challenge – to take care of ourselves and fight our own uncertainties and doubts. Are **you** kind and encouraging to yourself? We need to pay more attention to our personal internal conversations – try and stay above the negative, judgmental chatter and remember that we are beloved children of God, so focus on that love to get you through life’s challenges. I rely on devotionals and reading scripture daily to refocus and affirm that I am not alone. Most important, in my opinion, is asking God for help and affirming that **his will** is what matters. As we become more attuned and submit to God’s plan for us, the weight of trying to control life is lifted and we are renewed and encouraged. As with Paul, God is always there for you when you need strength and courage – you only need to ask. Paul had faith in the Lord to press on even after persecution, beatings, and jail. We should personally have that same faith...

Encouragement for All God's People

Now, let's move on to encouraging others. Our second scripture passage today is from Paul's first letter to the **Thessalonians Chapter 5, verses 11-14. He writes...**

**“Therefore, encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing. Now we ask you, brothers and sisters, to acknowledge those who work hard among you, who care for you in the Lord and who admonish you. Hold them in the highest regard in love because of their work.**

**Live in peace with each other. And we urge you, brothers and sisters, warn those who are idle and disruptive, encourage the disheartened, help the weak, be patient with everyone.”**

**Again, this is the word of the Lord...(thanks be to God)**

These were Paul's final instructions to the people of Thessalonica: to care for each other, encourage each other and build each other up in the faith. I'm sure we have all had times that we have needed encouragement from a parent, friend, coach, or mentor. I know that I have. I feel *one of the most critical facets of encouragement* is helping someone to do something that they might *imagine* is impossible or that they just can't do. So, think about a personal experience when you were maybe a bit down, worn out, scared, or facing an important challenge. Who was there for you to help you, to encourage you to move on...? Did you take the time to thank them for that support?

Conversely, do we appreciate those who hold us accountable? Those who love us the most and take the risk to be truth-tellers or do we just brush them off, ignore them or take them for granted. We need to take the time to acknowledge these special people in our lives.

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Do we stop to help others in need or friends who we know are suffering or do we just look the other way and assume that they will ask for help or someone else will do something?

I think we all have times we suffer from “busy-ness” - just adding more and more to every day. I know I do. Sometimes, as Stephen Covey writes in Seven Habits of Highly Effective People, we tend to avoid doing the **most important things** because the ‘**urgent things**’ get our attention. In this age of instant news, text messages and cell phones, it takes effort to turn it all off and focus on what is truly important. It is critical for us to stop, recognize and encourage each other. We can do it alone for a brief while, but then, eventually, we need to lean on someone else for love and support.

Paul had many friends as he traveled - Silas, Aquila & Priscilla, Timothy and Luke and he leaned on these friends through his long missionary journeys, giving them messages of faith and hope as he received the love and support of God. We have friends and family that travel along with us as well. Take the time to acknowledge them and thank them for their encouragement, too. Reach out to those who you know need help, prayers, and the courage to continue. Offer to walk with them as Jesus walks beside all of us.

### Encouragement for Those Who Minister to Us

In the ancient city of Corinth, we sat on old stones among the trees and shared a message and communion. The picture on the front of the bulletin shows our communion supper. It was very powerful and humbling to sit in the same space where the earliest members of the Christian faith had listened to Paul and others preach of God’s love for them. David, our leader spoke of love and then said, **“one of the most effective things you can**

***do for the ministry of Jesus Christ is to encourage those who minister to you.***” Do we do this? Or do our leaders and pastors hear more that the lights are too bright, it’s too cold or hot in the building, the sermon was too long, the session doesn’t listen, yada, yada, yada. It can be discouraging. How often do we take the time to thank our pastors and our church leaders for the work they do, for their prayers and visits, for their unending love of God? We need to be better at this. *We all need encouragement*, even Paul, who met Jesus on the road to Damascus and knew at that moment that Jesus would be with him. God **is** with us, and we need to make sure to show God’s love and support for those who love us, pray for us and want us to find God’s peace.

So, on that beautiful day in Corinth, David issued a challenge to all of us, that I now put to you. Find an actual piece of paper and a pen (not your phone or computer) and write a hand-written note to someone who ministers the word of the Lord to you. Will they just read it and throw it away? Probably not. They will feel your love and the love of God come through that message and be encouraged and then go back to that note (or notes) in times of trial or discouragement to not grow weary, but to continue in the faith.

### Summary

So, my friends, please keep God in ***your*** heart and know that **God loves you** and is there to encourage you in your faith. Find ways to encourage yourself through prayer, meditation, music, reading scripture, and fellowship.

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Look for opportunities to encourage your brothers and sisters when they are struggling. We all need each other for a smile, a kind word, a song or a prayer. Be there for one another to lean on and find encouragement.

Finally, accept the challenge to reach out to those who minister God's love to you and tell them how much you appreciate them and their efforts. Lift them up often, so that we may all keep walking our faith journey together.

**Amen and Amen!**