

August 2023

Dear Friends,

When we talk about stepping out with courage, it is often to attempt something new. Whilst I'm sure that there are those who have been parachuting, on a zip wire or abseiling these are things which would take a huge amount of courage for others. At the same time, preparing to move to a new school, or to take on a new experience in some way also takes courage.

We often use the word in a different context when we talk of encouraging. The word encourage comes from the old French word *encoragier* which means to strengthen or hearten. We can see the links with courage here very easily. We don't need to look far to find Bible passages which are encouraging. For example, in 1 Thessalonians chapter 5 we read, 'Therefore encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing.' There are many other passages that can strengthen or hearten us in some way.

Jesus built up his disciples by coming alongside them, in the conversations they had and the actions they took. He built community and fellowship with others through his encouragement of them. Today, we are encouraged by God working through the Holy Spirit and we can find peace, hope and joy in ways that come only from God. At the same time, God works through others and the Holy Spirit prompts us in this.

I have been greatly encouraged during this year in the way that people have come together, supporting, and caring for one another in a variety of circumstances. I have also felt it personally at various points during the year and offer you my heartfelt thanks. It has been a time where we have navigated the changes that we have faced and been strengthened through this. We are called to love God and to love each other. This is the outworking of our love for God in the way we respond to the love shown to us by God, who first loved us.

The Holy Spirit acts as a great encourager by prompting us into something new, equipping us with the skills and the people that are needed. We continue to discern how God is calling us as individuals and churches to be at the heart of the communities we serve. As we do this, we should continue to come before God in prayer and share with one another where we believe God is leading. We will be encouraged by one another as we share, and we will see God at work in a way that shares the love of Christ through the Holy Spirit, and it will undoubtedly lead to some exciting places. We may need courage to take the step out that is needed but we do it alongside one another.

During August, when maybe the 'normal' routines are not quite as 'normal,' we can perhaps take some time to look back over the last year and reflect on where we have seen God at work. What are the little signs that come together to paint a new picture? How might these encourage us, and others, as we look ahead? Be encouraged in all we have done, and all that God is, and will do, in the future.

God bless,
Chris