

Today's passage from 1 Thessalonians continues on from, and has similar themes to, verses 1-8 that we looked at last week. Last week we concentrated on the integrity of Paul, of his message, of his motives and his methods. Today I am going to pick up on the way that Paul uses images of parenthood to talk about his relationship with the Thessalonians - and we will see that it has great relevance for the way we relate to each other. In v.7 in last week's reading Paul describes himself as being like a mother towards the Thessalonians, now in v.11 he says he dealt with them like a Father.

So before I start I should be clear that Paul is not specifying how parents should divide their roles – we cannot look in this passage to find guidance about the division of roles that God might want, or not want, between parents. Paul isn't saying this is what a mother or Father should do – but building his point on what he experienced parents doing.

As a mother to the Thessalonians he was:

Gentle

Sharing the gospel

Sharing his life

As a Father he was:

Encouraging

Comforting

Urging lifestyle

As a Mother

Gentle (or nurturing) As their mother he chose not to be overbearing – but nurturing. As an apostle of Christ he could have required that they looked after his needs, but instead his emphasis was upon their needs, not his. The emphasis of a loving mother would tend to the nurturing needs of her children. She wouldn't be saying – “You can't wake in the night I want my sleep”; she wouldn't say “you cant want feeding, or your nappy (or whatever the Thessalonica babies wore) changing I want an afternoon off!” As we look forward I wonder how the church would look if everyone loved the others with maternal love. When decisions about service times,

service styles, types of music etc. need to be made, would we vote just for what we like – or what we feel would encourage others into the church, or would help others grow. In my recent Rectors Rambles I mentioned that we need to look for more PCC members. If you think somebody you know fits this attitude – able to think, not just about what works for them, – but concerned about what works for others – then suggest they stand.

Sharing the gospel was more than telling people about how they can become Christians, it was also helping them see how Jesus fits into every part of their lives. Being a Christian community involves working out together how to walk with Jesus in every part of our lives. Living as a Christian in the workplace and in the home can be a challenge - but one we can explore together in housegroups and when we meet up together.

Sharing his life One Mum was sharing her shock about one time when she was talking to her child -she said, “I opened my mouth and my mother came out!” When we live closely with someone their way of life and their attitudes rub off on us. We thought last week about the impact Paul had by not just talking about faith from a distance, but sharing his life with the Thessalonians. Being a member of a church family is far more than just going to the same building – it is about sharing lives in a way that impacts how we live.

As a Father

Encouraging: I want to focus on two ways we can encourage one another:

1. When I was in the sixth form at school, the music department decided to put on the light opera “Pirates of Penzance.” Not surprisingly, they struggled to find enough male singers prepared to take part. My friend Clive got very involved and started working on me: “Come on, you’ll be good at this, you’ll have a great time etc.” His trust in my acting, and certainly in my singing, were probably a bit misguided but I eventually agreed to audition. In reality, they were so desperate that an audition was unnecessary – anyone who turned up would be given a part. Clive was right about me enjoying myself, but probably not quite as accurate with his assumption about the quality of my contribution. The serious point is that I only did it because he encouraged me. I expect many of us would say that there are things we are doing in the church which we would never have done – were it not for the encouragement

of others. It is so important that we look out for potential in one another and encourage it.

2. The second form of encouragement is supporting what others are doing. As parents of children with musical abilities, Alison and I have travelled all over, encouraged practicing, and been enthusiastic at concerts, even when they were in the very early stages. In the church we can encourage one another by expressing appreciation of what others do – and putting ourselves out to help – even if it is an area outside our normal enjoyment. A small group of people between ourselves and Heworth Methodists are beginning to plan outside activities during Advent. These will only work if everyone who can gets involved – but if lots of you do, it will inspire and encourage them in further ventures.

Comforting: There is a famous section in the Bayeux tapestry where a bishop is seen laying about a group of reluctant **soldiers** with **the** flat of **his** sword. **The** caption says: “**Bishop Odo comforts the troops.**” “Comfort” is a word that has changed its meaning over the years. Nowadays we would think of the shoulder to cry on or the chair we love to collapse into. In the NIV it is used in its traditional sense of motivating and strengthening – especially when our strength is flagging or we are fearful for the future. The gift of comforting is something that is very necessary at this time. I sense that we have reached a new state within the pandemic. The original lockdown was hard but there was a shared sense of determination to beat both the virus and the impact it was having on us. Now, as the second wave is really starting to bite, there is a general tiredness across the spectrum: from medical staff still exhausted, to the chancellor who doesn’t have the same enthusiasm for finding money, to friends who want to meet up and families possibly unable to gather at Christmas. A Christian community can comfort one another - we will all struggle at times – but not all at the same time – so, those who currently have energy can support those who feel tired whether physically or emotionally. Even more than that, we can remind each other that we have a hope that the rest of our community doesn’t have – we have the promise that there is nothing that can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus – In the present he promises strength to overcome and, in the future, victory over death

Urging lifestyle

When I first became a Christian I adopted what I call a lowest common denominator faith. By that, I mean that I looked at what other Christians were doing and combined their bad habits – so if one Christian drank a lot, I felt I could do so; If another told dirty jokes I felt I could do so; If one Christian didn't read his bible regularly I felt I didn't need to do so. Now, for each of these other Christians they may have only this one failing – but they gave me an excuse for living a sub-standard Christian life across all these areas – and many more. When I woke up to the absurdity of this, I thought I was an exception, but I now realise that, although we may not do this in such an extreme way, this lowest common denominator phenomenon is common. Today I want to encourage you to look again at your role models – do you use them to help you live more like Christ, or as an excuse for not doing so. Whether we like it or not, we are all being used as role models: Paul could say: "Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ!" Whether we say these words or not, others **will** imitate us – so my final challenge for you in closing is: will those who copy you be imitating Christ, or using you as an excuse to not do so?

The Collect

Almighty God,
 you have knit together your elect
 in one communion and fellowship
 in the mystical body of your Son
 Christ our Lord:
 grant us grace so to follow your
 blessed saints
 in all virtuous and godly living
 that we may come to those
 inexpressible joys
 that you have prepared for those who
 truly love you;
 through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,
 who is alive and reigns with you,
 in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
 one God, now and for ever.

All Amen.

The Lord's Prayer

**All Our Father in heaven,
 hallowed be your name,
 your kingdom come,
 your will be done,
 on earth as in heaven.
 Give us today our daily bread.
 Forgive us our sins
 as we forgive those who sin against
 us.
 Lead us not into temptation
 but deliver us from evil.
 For the kingdom, the power,
 and the glory are yours
 now and for ever.
 Amen.**