

**Scripture: Colossians 1: 1-14 & Luke 10: 25-37**

**Sermon: Moving Forward Together: Seeing, Speaking, and Serving in the Spirit**

### **Prologue – Change**

Well I wonder if anyone is ever read the hitchhiker's guide to the Galaxy, by Douglas Adams? If so, you may remember the brilliant line uttered by the character Vroomfondle in protest that something was about to change:

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It is a wonderful but accurate reflection on how humans struggle with change and in many cases are only able to accept it when it comes with the promise of a neat and tidy solution. Rarely does life offer that.

Of course, life is full of change, and as a parish church, we now find ourselves in a moment of transition as things are changing. Hopefully you have all read Paul's letter last week outlining the process, but I've still had many people speculating about how they want things to be *during* and *after* the period of vacancy, or in other words, *rigidly defined areas*.

When we look at the New Testament, and particularly the characters of Jesus and St Paul, one thing that being in and around them guaranteed, was that change was happening. Change for the people personally; for the faith that they followed; and for Society and life as they knew it. And it was difficult for them to get their heads around. Much of the New Testament is an attempt to ‘*get heads around*’ the changes to life and faith that the Holy Spirit was creating.

Today's readings from Luke and Colossians are examples of this but also reveal truths that speak directly to the season of change we face as a parish. From these passages, we can draw some vital lessons for our Christian journey, especially as we move forward together. At the heart of it all are three things that shape our approach: seeing, speaking, and serving.

## Seeing

There are many titles given to the parable Jesus tells in today's Gospel, and just as many messages drawn from it. But among the most vital is this: the call to *notice* and *respond*. It's a summons to pastoral care—not as an optional extra, but as core to Christian living.

In this parish, I remain deeply inspired by the pastoral instinct that seems to happen so naturally. People look out for one another, and it's not confined to those in leadership. This noticing, this responding, flows quietly through the congregation, and it's a Spiritual gift we must never take for granted.

And yet, even in caring communities, it's inevitable that some needs go unseen, especially in seasons like this one forthcoming, when rhythms change, when there's more for fewer to do. In a time of vacancy and transition, busyness can obscure vulnerability.

The injured man in the parable was quiet—perhaps unconscious. He was visible, certainly, but not unusual. On that notorious stretch of road, suffering was commonplace. Why get involved?

But if our spiritual eyes—and pastoral antennae—are attuned to the Holy Spirit's nudging, then we begin to notice what others overlook. We see the quiet suffering, the subtle grief, the person drifting at the edges. This is a call to *pastoral vigilance*, especially now, when more may feel uncertain and the risk of people slipping through the net increases.

Let us pray that the Spirit will work through our eyes, ears and then our voices. And that's the second thing I want to talk about.

## **Speaking**

We have the book of Colossians - and a Christian community of believers in the city of Colossae - not because of St Paul or St Timothy, but thanks to someone far less known: did you spot his name in today's reading? Epaphras.

Epaphras is one of those New Testament figures who almost vanishes between the lines, yet Paul holds him in the highest esteem. It was Epaphras who first spoke of Jesus in Colossae. It was Epaphras who noticed trouble - probably false teaching, and brought word to Paul out of deep pastoral concern. And it was his voice, his testimony, that founded the Church in that city.

We don't know how he did it. Perhaps he spoke from compassion, perhaps he simply shared how the grace of Christ transformed his life. His name which is linked to Aphrodite, a Pagan god, suggests he came from a pagan background. And yet, he ditched that and proclaimed a new Lord: Jesus. Through his boldness and witness, faith took root in and a Christian community began.

I think that many of us are on safe ground with the pastoral care I spoke about, but the word "evangelism" is scary. I recall our Lent Conversations from last year where there was honest, open concerns about sharing our faith and inviting others to 'come and see'. I get that, I really do.

But can I encourage us to be more bold? Our society is not just spiritually hungry, but famished and is searching in many, and some strange, areas for satisfaction. Sometimes all it takes is an invitation to a Church service or group; or a simple testimony about how our faith gives us hope when talking about the horrors on the news; or an act of kindness offered because we say we do it because we believe Jesus calls us to.

In times of transition, it's tempting to withdraw. But Epaphras challenges us otherwise. So let us ask the Holy Spirit to embolden our voices, that we might gently invite others to hear the hope we hold.

## **Serving**

Boldness isn't always about speaking publicly or proclaiming the Gospel—it can be found in quieter acts too. Sometimes, it's stepping up to volunteer for something we've never done before. That kind of boldness can feel just as daunting, yet it's profoundly appreciated in times of change.

One truth we should always hold onto is this: we are never serving alone. In the church, we work together—we support one another, lean on one another, and grow with one another. This has been the pattern since the beginning. One of the first things Jesus did was gather a team, and thanks to the Holy Spirit, Christ is still forming, guiding, and empowering teams today.

Both readings show us collaborative ministry at its best. The Samaritan didn't act alone; the innkeeper became part of the healing process—and even the donkey played its part! God works not just through humans, but through all creation. Imagine the flourishing of society if we worked *with* creation rather than against it.

Paul and Timothy needed Epaphras - his on-the-ground wisdom, his lived experience, and his boldness! Epaphras needed their spiritual depth to help bring clarity to the Colossian church. And all three needed the Holy Spirit to direct, unite, and bless their work.

So as we approach this time of vacancy, let's remember: the Church was never meant to be a solo effort. It's a shared calling, a Spirit-formed team effort. Our gifts, however quiet, however insignificant we might think really matter and can make a difference!

Together, with the Spirit among us, we are more than ready to move forward.

## **The Holy Spirit**

Our future has no *rigidly defined areas of doubt and uncertainty* and a good thing to, because that would leave no room for faith, growth and for the Holy Spirit to do what Holy Spirit does so well, and that is do new things to advance God's kingdom.

So let us walk into this new season not with fear, but with the same Spirit-led courage that inspired the first believers - those who faced uncertainty not with 'rigid expectations', but with open hearts and bold trust in Christ. May our seeing, speaking, and serving echo theirs, and help us discover the Holy Spirit already at work and waiting for us to join in. Amen

*Rev'd Richard Haynes 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Trinity 13 July 2025*