

A para what?

The last few weeks have been difficult for most of us and life has been so different from what we are used to. Last week a decision had to be made about the financial situation of Parramatta Mission and as a result of that the placements of Manas and myself (Christine) as well as the supply of Clive will all conclude at the end of September. This decision was a very difficult one for everyone, and none of us wanted to have it made, yet it is the reality which we must face.

There are some people who will be angry, others who are shocked and many others who are grieving or really sad. Those feelings are made harder by the Covid 19 restrictions. Even though some of these are being lifted we still need to have precautions in place for a long time to come.

The feelings we have connect us very closely to the disciples who were listening to Jesus preparing them for his leaving them. They did not want to hear what he had to say. They did not want him to go as they loved him, learnt from him and looked to him to lead them. He was their teacher, their 'brother' and their friend. And he was going.

And so we hear from the gospel of John some words of comfort.

*¹⁵ "If you love me, keep my commands. ¹⁶ And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another **advocate** to help you and be with you forever— ¹⁷ the Spirit of truth.*

We do not pick it up in the English but when we read the gospel of John in Greek we come across a word 'paraklete'. This word can be understood in a couple of ways. In some versions of the bible (like the one we just read) we come across the word Advocate. This is a legal term and sometimes we might have the word Counsellor (not a therapist but legal counsel). Both Advocate and Counsellor speak about someone coming who would stand up for us, challenge us and guide us. The other way to understand paraklete is as a helper or comforter. It is also someone who can console. I think that perhaps all of these understandings come into play when we think of God's Spirit.



There are words of reassurance- *'I will not leave you as orphans'*.

And there are words that remind us what to do in the waiting time and the times of change.

²¹ Whoever has my commands and keeps them is the one who loves me.

So there is a lot of comfort in the words of Jesus to his disciples.

Many years later we read a letter supposedly from Peter to the people who lived in different countries and who were Christians in the early church. Although the name Peter makes us think of Simon Peter the style of writing is probably someone else with better education and it does sound a little more like Paul with the way 'Peter's' argument goes.

It is easy to simply move on as this is not an easy reading but it does pick up some key things to think about when we recognise the changes that lie ahead of us.

"Do not fear their threats; do not be frightened." We do not know what the ministry leadership will look like as we move forward but, just as Jesus reassured his disciples 1 Peter reminds us to not be frightened.

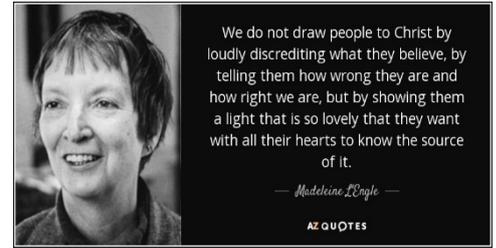
We are also reminded to *Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect.*

One of the things which has been repeated time and time again to the disciples and for each of us is to be ready to share our faith in ordinary and everyday ways. This means that people see us, are curious about why we do what we do and we are then able to share our faith. I know it is easier for me than it is for others as I am often asked about my faith. This has come about

because of practice and really spending some time thinking about what I have to say and how it might be heard.

I was quite drawn to a quote from Madeline L'Engle:

We do not draw people to Christ by loudly discrediting what **they** believe, by telling them how wrong **they are** and how right **we are**, but by showing them a light so lovely that **they** want with all their hearts to know the source of it.



Whether you like it or not I'm going to be around for another 4 months and I hope that in that time I can help all of us hold onto the reassuring words of Jesus.

There will be other voices which speak into our lives- especially as we experience the social isolation. But a little like the story of the deaf frog, I pray that the voices you hear are the ones which speak loudly words of encouragement and hope.

May you experience the comfort of the paraklete- God's Spirit- with us this day and all days.

