

## Pause for Thought

### ‘Wish you were here!’

I was quite saddened to learn that the traditional holiday pastime of sending postcards to family and friends is fast going out of fashion and sales of picture postcards have rapidly declined in recent years as a result. I can clearly remember the annual family holiday to Filey, during which my Mum would invest considerable time writing postcards to family and friends, most of whom she would most likely see again very soon after we arrived back home. Along with ice cream and sandcastles, this was all part of rip-roaring holiday fun during the 1960’s and 70’s. Real or imagined, the classic line ‘wish you were here’ somehow became synonymous with the sending of holiday postcards.

With this in mind, I was particularly struck by these words from St Paul in 1 Thessalonians 2:17-20:

*‘As for us, brothers and sisters, when, for a short time, we were made orphans by being separated from you – in person, not in heart – we longed with great eagerness to see you face to face. For we wanted to come to you – certainly I, Paul, wanted to again and again – but Satan blocked our way. For what is our hope or joy or crown of boasting before our Lord Jesus Christ at his coming? Is it not you? Yes, you are our glory and joy!’*

What is Paul saying in this passage but ‘wish you were here!’ or ‘wish I could be with you!’ Paul was clearly not only missing his friends in Thessalonica, but one can sense the frustration he felt at this separation. Although Paul wasn’t living in the middle of a national health crisis, this passage speaks deeply into our present situation. Whilst we understand the reasons why, we nevertheless miss seeing each other face to face and engaging in the normal expressions of church life, worship and witness.

Yet, see how Paul concludes these verses, describing his friends as ‘our glory and joy’ (v.20). We may be restricted in our regular activities, but we are still God’s ‘glory and joy’. Despite not being able to meet in person, we are finding new and creative ways to live out, share and express our Christian faith. With the help of technology, we can connect with each other in all sorts of ways. Those who are able, are generously assisting others in practical ways across our community. Still others are following Paul’s example and writing letters. However, of all the gifts and resources God has given to help us during this time, I believe it is prayer that is our most powerful and precious spiritual resource. How can I be so sure? Because I am privileged to hear the accounts of prayerful, faithful lives being lived out and of prayers being offered and answered, in the many conversations and communications I have with people in the course of my daily work. In this admittedly difficult and uncertain time, my own prayer for us all is that each one of us might know the peace of Christ dwelling in our hearts and that we may be surrounded by God’s glory and joy.

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