

## **Pause for thought, Saturday 6 February, 1 Corinthians 16.10-end**

The readings for Morning Prayer this morning are more uplifting than the past few weeks, particularly how Paul finishes his first letter to the Corinthians.

In the letter Paul asks the people of Corinth to welcome Timothy if he comes to visit as he passes through on his way to Paul. Timothy a young man who Paul takes under his wing and develops.

Paul says that Apollos won't be coming even though Paul had wanted him to, but he doesn't admonish him for saying no, he simply hopes he will come in his own time. He then goes on to mention Stephanas, Fortunatus and Achaicus, from Achaia. The letter also refers to Aquila and Prisca who send greetings from the churches of Asia.

Achaia was a province of the Roman Empire, consisting of the Peloponnese, Attica, Boeotia, Euboea, the Cyclades and parts of Phthiotis, Aetolia-Acarnania and Phocis. In the north, it bordered on the provinces of Epirus vetus and Macedonia. And of course we know about the seven churches of Asia from the book of Revelation. All were located in Asia Minor, present day Turkey.

I find this uplifting because it shows that right from the beginning the Christian church was multi-national and multi-cultural. This wasn't without its challenges. The tensions between Jewish and Gentile Christians, justification by faith and justification by law are well documented in Paul's letter to the Romans, but what a joy that Christians around the world today reflect the diversity of the Early Church and more. And the reference to Prisca, also known as Priscilla, is important because it places women at the centre of the church. She and her husband Aquila are of equal standing and have a shared ministry.

For me the key phrase in this passage is from verse thirteen, "Keep alert, stand firm in your faith, be courageous, be strong". In these days of lockdown, how can we be courageous and strong?

Church buildings are closed, there are more closed than open, and for many of us there is a strong and spiritual nourishment from space and place, smell, ritual and fellowship that is missing. But being church is not the same as being *in* church. We can be church wherever we are, whatever we are doing.

As the days get longer and the weather gets better we may be in our gardens more and have the opportunity to talk to our neighbours over the wall, or say hello or give a smile to a stranger when out for our daily exercise. We can welcome someone from far away in the chat of a virtual service, or travel great distances over the ether to join online worship to show Christian solidarity with our brothers and sisters. We can listen to a service on the radio, knowing that others are listening with us. Above all we can pray. We can pray for strength and courage. We can pray for ourselves and for others.

Perhaps, just perhaps, we can get a glimpse of the strength and courage of our Christian sisters and brothers across the world for whom being church is always without being *in* church for fear of injustice or persecution. Amen.