

Encouragement & Sharing - 15th January 2023

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 15 January 2023

Preacher: Ian McKeown

[0 : 00] So encouragement, encouragement. We know it when we hear it, don't we, from others, when we see it. But I guess it's a bit more than just for us to cheer on others from the side.

It's not really either just about giving advice, is it? And it isn't necessarily just about making someone feel better in the moment. Although, you know, that's not a bad thing, is it?

I think it's more about reminding each other, pointing out in love to each other the real source of the power that strengthens us and gives us the courage to carry on even when things are difficult.

So it comes from God, his spirit, soaking deep into our inner being. And so it's not so much about what we can do, but what can God do through us?

And that's why I think it's so important that we share our stories with one another about the things that God is doing in our lives.

[1 : 10] Often very messy, warts and all lives. And we're just being upfront and we're being honest about that. And sometimes it's really wonderful, really uplifting stuff, hearing good news stories that, come on, let's be honest, we so desperately need to hear at the moment.

Because it touches our hearts and it lifts our spirits, doesn't it? We say it often enough, don't we? Though we are many, we are one body.

We're connected. And sometimes it's just being present with someone. And it's a hug. It's a kind word. It's a smile.

It's a cup of tea. It's an ear and probably a face as well to listen. Really listen. Just taking the time to be there for someone.

And then sometimes it's just being willing to have compassion with someone's tears and cries.

[2 : 15] Sometimes you just have to sit in the dust and the ashes for as long as it takes, don't you? So Paul, in his letter to the Thessalonians, says this.

Encourage one another and build each other up just as, in fact, you are doing. And then again in 1 Corinthians, when you come together, each of you has a hymn or a word of instruction, a revelation, a tongue or an interpretation.

Everything must be done so that the church may be built up. And so that's exactly what we're going to do this morning.

We're going to share with one another the things that are or have encouraged us. And then how might we encourage others? So what I'd like to do, I'm going to shut up in a bit and say no more, okay.

What I'd like to do is for us to get into some smaller groups, maybe four or five people you feel comfortable talking to or not, as the case may be. Please feel free to move the chairs around, okay.

[3 : 31] They don't have to stay where they are. And if you're able and happy to do so, to share, okay, with one another your answer or response to these two questions.

So the first one is what or maybe who has or is encouraging you? And the second question is how might we then encourage one another?

So what stories, what words have you got to share? And as I say, it might be a big thing or maybe you think it's just a little thing. But of course, it's no less important.

So we're going to do that for about five minutes, okay, no more than that. And then we're going to open up the mic to hear your stories, your words of encouragement. So if you'd like to sort of turn into some little groups and give your attention to those two.

Thank you. So it's great to see so many conversations going on. And like always at St. John's, once you wind people up, it'll go and go.

[4 : 38] And that's absolutely wonderful. And also all the laughter. That's encouraging. So I know that Helen Emery has kindly offered, she contacted me yesterday, to share some of her journey

since coming here to St. John's.

So Helen, if I come over to you or do you want to come over here? Yeah, give her a round of applause. Thank you. Thank you. That's encouraging to start.

Thank you. Yeah, I'm Helen. If you don't know me, I'm married to Neil, the baldy, beardy one over there. And we started coming about 18 months ago when we reopened following lockdown.

I say we, as in the church, we, our church, because it took me quite a long time to be able to refer to St. John's as our church.

And after moving from another church where I really felt at home, everybody knew me really well. I was very involved in lots of different ways.

[5 : 53] I had lots of roles. So you're probably wondering why we left there, but that's another conversation. So if you want to speak to me about that, that's fine. But what I really felt like I wanted to share today was a bit about that journey since I started coming here, in case it's encouraging to people and if it is helpful.

So there's two main things really that occurred to me when I saw that we could share about what's been happening. And one was definitely around my sense of identity. So I had questions every single Sunday when I came here about who am I now?

Like what is my role? How do people see me? Because people don't know me. And so I'm really thankful to the people here who have been so loving and so accepting of me, just as I am.

And I love that this is a place where authenticity is really celebrated and encouraged so that we can be honest and open.

So I just think this is brilliant. God's really been showing me through various different means, I think, how I'm seen by him. You know, completely loved and made in his image and all that.

[7 : 07] And that my value isn't in what I do, a role. It's in sort of who I am inherently. So really to, it was teaching me to sort of worry less about what other people think of me, because I'm sure they've got lots of other things to think about.

And that I'm okay with the fact that I cry most weeks in church and that I'm very emotional. So really it was just about this sense of identity and God showing me that although I knew that in my heart, in my head rather, that I really started experiencing that here.

And then the other thing really was about who God is. So not just who I am, but who God is. And I used to think that I was really quite open to questioning my understanding of this whole faith business with God and Bible and Jesus and everything.

I thought I was quite open to everything. But since coming here, I have realized that there was quite a lot of questions that I'd left unanswered that I'd maybe ignored or I'd got a bit static in my thinking. And again, through various different means, I've been able to explore a lot. Everything really about faith has been up for grabs.

[8 : 21] And I've been reading a lot and having loads of conversations and listening to some quite heavy theological podcasts, which are fabulous. But I guess I'm now in a place where I can accept that no one really has all those answers and that my tiny little brain is never really going to figure it all out.

And I guess the key is just that God has been so much more real and present to me in exploring the questions than he ever has in the certainty.

So I suppose I just want to encourage anyone who has got those questions about who they are or who God is, just to keep exploring, keep talking to each other in this fabulous community that we've got.

And yeah, I'm hoping that was some encouragement and landed with someone. Thank you.

Brilliant. Brilliant. Thank you.

Thanks, Helen. Thanks for being so honest. Well, thank you that you've come here and that you've joined us as well. Yeah. Thank you. Thank you. So just to let you know, I'll tell her now, we're recording this.

[9 : 29] Okay. So if there is anything... So just to let people know anything that you want to share, just be aware of that. And we can always delete things afterwards. But is there anyone else who wants to share something?

Okay. Don't worry. Just go for it. Morning, Norm. Morning, Norm. As most of you know, my life and Yvonne's life changed quite a lot last year.

Being in hospital to start with, quite unexpected. And then they took me driving... Well, they haven't actually taken me driving, I saw half of me, but I've got epilepsy, so I can't drive anymore.

And I don't. So my life has changed an awful lot in the last 12 months. A time to struggle with my faith. I really do.

But through all that, and what I'm really here to say is a big thank you to all of you.

[10:32] I thank some people because I know them and they've been very good to us. They're lovely. And I can't do without you, basically.

I need you as a church. I just don't exist if you're not here for me. And I know you are. So I'm just really here to say thank you.

That's why I'm here. Just to say thank you. Thank you, Lord. Mike, do you want me to pray? Let's pray. Let's just pray.

Father, thank you for the faithfulness of Mike and Yvonne. And all the years and years and years of service that they've given here at St. John's.

And they've been such a blessing to us over those years. And in Mike's weakness that he feels at the moment, and that sense of just complete dependence on you, I pray that he has that sense of your presence very, very close to him.

[11:47] That light just flooding into his body. And your love. And that just bursts out through Mike and through Yvonne. Amen.

Thank you. Thank you. Thanks, Mike. Okay. Anybody else? Hi. Sorry. My name's Donna.

I don't really know what I'm going to say. But last week, when we did the thing with Ruth, I found it so challenging. I don't even know why.

I normally look forward to that service every year. I've kept all of my ones every year. And it's great to see just how God has worked through your life.

But last Sunday, I really found myself, like, focusing on negatives last week. And I found myself being so ungrateful.

[12:44] So ungrateful. I was thinking, how on earth can I not find anything positive to write when God has done so much for me last year?

He's done so much. And then, through this week, like, God has really, really been talking to me. Like, which I'm so thankful for.

Like, I think I realised last Sunday that I'd stopped asking God to open my ears to hear him properly. Because that's what I normally do. And this week, God has been telling me that don't focus on the negatives.

Don't focus on all of your little bad traits that you, you know, you know yourself. Like, oh dear, I shouted at the kids this day when I, you know, I should have just given them a love.

Or, you know, oh, I did this thing wrong. But he says, don't focus on the negatives. Just focus on the positives. Focus on me.

[13:49] Like, God knows every single one of us. He knows us inside out. He knows us before we were born. He knows the good that we will do. And he knows the bad that we will still do, no matter what.

But yet, he still chose us. He still loves us. And he will work those bad things out in his time. Not in our time.

And not when we think we're ready for that challenge. It's when we're not ready. When we think that we're not ready for that challenge is when he challenges us with it.

But that's so that we rely on him more. That's so that we draw closer to him. Because he loves us. Because he is a loving father who really does care for each and every one of us.

And so no matter where you are in your walk with God at the minute. Whether you are on the mountaintops. Or whether you are in the deepest valleys. Or you're just floating about.

[14:53] He is with every single one of us. He is with every single one of us. And where you are right now is where he wants you to be. Because he has a plan for every single one of us.

And it is a perfect plan. That only you can do. And so wherever you are, be encouraged that you are not forgotten. Or you are not on your own.

And he is beside us. Because he promises us that he will be there in the deepest waters and through the fires. I mean, he doesn't promise that we won't go through them. He tells us we will.

But he does promise that he will be there with us. So just be encouraged that whether you feel near or far from God. He is always there.

He is watching us. And he will give us the strength that we need to go through whatever we are going through right now. All we need to do is just trust in him.

[15 : 50] And just relax in his presence. In his love. And enjoy him carrying us. Just go along for the ride.

And just don't lose your love or your joy as well. That's another really important thing that he said to me this week. Do not lose your love or your joy.

And just focus on him. Thank you. Amen. Brilliant. Brilliant. Thank you.

Thank you, Donna. Thank you for your courage to share that. And that's a real, real word of encouragement. It really is. Right. I think I saw it. Yeah, I did. So another hand come up. The back here.

Hi, everybody. My name is Cynthia. But I like to be called Sonia. If you call me Sonia, I definitely know you're a close family member. Which that's what you all are at the moment.

[16 : 48] You know, with the rest of my gang. I call it that way. We basically, we're talking about animals, dogs, more or less.

And I told him that when I grew up, we had dogs. But in Africa, dogs, basically, you would have them for hunting or just for guarding the house.

And my husband did smoke. He used to smoke. And when he smoked, he grew up with dogs. More one or two dogs when he was growing up.

And I said to him, you know, Jane, if you did smoke, maybe I would actually look on getting a puppy. Knowing, nah, there's no chances. He's been in this for quite a long time.

I can't say it's a disappointment. But it was a challenge which I lost. And we ended up with a puppy in the house. And at that time, I didn't know how to cope with it.

[17 : 48] And he also, fortunately, I got poorly and to be at the hospital for many, many weeks. And I had to be dealing with the dog. And we were discussing the friendship that the animal grew within me.

For somebody who grew up knowing that the dogs stay outside. And then all of a sudden, it became my best friend. And I seem to be the one with more worry, more than the person that brought him into the house.

So I come in from at work. And the first thing that I'm asking is, where's Dax? And has anybody taken a walk with him anywhere he's gone outside? The encouragement in this was the part where we basically, as neighbors in the community, we don't know each other.

You know, we basically would see each other and one wouldn't bother. But because of walking the dogs, we've sort of like managed to know that these dogs belongs in this house.

That dog belongs in this house. Even if you don't know who that person is. But because of that dog that you've walked around, they become friends. And gradually, we would actually become friends. And it might not mean anything to anybody else.

[18 : 57] But it does to me. When you come from afar and you've got no family members, just having somebody smile. Just like when I come in through the door and everybody sees me.

And everybody, somebody will always find a chair for me. I have never left the church without a hug. I always get a hug. It didn't matter who it was for. And that matters to me, especially on the environment that I work in, to come in somewhere through the door.

And there's a leak wave. There's a big wave. There's touching a shoulder. It meant so much. Even if I will be coming from work at night, it encourages me to say, gosh, I haven't seen my family for two weeks.

I better go there and have to look. Regardless, the children love to be here. And I accepted. Today, I just wanted to thank everybody. Not that you've done anything, but the smiles that you give me when I'm coming through the door.

I've never came early. So every time I come through, just like the smile that I get from each and every you, don't say, don't ever think I'm not noticing that I'm seeing that.

[20 : 10] And for that, may you be blessed, all of you. And thank you for the smiles and for encouraging me that even if I'm at home, I do have a family. And you guys are my family.

Thank you. Thank you. Brilliant. Thank you. Thank you. Yeah, know that you are very loved and accepted. We see you.

And we're hardly here. We're not normally here on time either. So you're not alone. Anybody else? Anybody else? Don't go home thinking, oh, I wish I'd just shared that.

I wish I'd just said that. You don't know sometimes when you say things just how much of an encouragement, just how much it speaks into other people's lives because it's going on for them as well.

Thank you. Hello, everybody. My name is Barbara. And I thought I had to come today. And what you've done, the encouragement.

[21 : 11] I had to have my cat put down on Thursday because she was so poorly. And part of me was feeling I was a murderer.

And my friend Jane has been with me every step of the way this past week. And she tells me I'm silly. I've done the right thing.

But I couldn't have coped without her because mischief was my life, especially when I lost my husband. She was my friend.

And a strange thing happened on the Thursday night when she was put down in the afternoon. It was about four o'clock in the morning.

And I was sending a prayer to my God to say, please let me know I didn't kill her. And all of a sudden, there was a flash of light.

[22 : 16] It wasn't a car. It wasn't my hall light. It was just this beautiful flash of white light. And it was God telling me she's up there playing.

And my friend Jane. I've got to thank you, darling. And finding this church has been a family.

And Jane and I are becoming far, far more involved now. We're doing little friends. And we're helping out with tea. So I've got a purpose now to get out of my bed.

Because it took me a lot to come this morning. But I knew I had to. And this is why. Thank you for listening to me. Can I just pray with you?

I pray with you. Yeah. Father God, we thank you for Barbara's. What she's just shared. And the pain is so raw still. I pray that you would comfort her.

[23 : 18] And be with her. And let her know that you never let go. You never let go. Amen. Amen. Hello.

I'm Millie. Ten years ago, I started to come to little friends with my grandchildren. And I loved it so much.

And it was so welcoming. And Gemma with the kids. She is just amazing. Woo! Yeah. And anyway, of course, once they turn three, they have to leave.

But I didn't want to leave. So I stayed on. And I've been helping ever since. And this is how I've come to this church.

And again, I find it really welcoming. Because I do find things hard to do on my own. But I do come. I come here because I know. I just know I'm going to get the encouragement that I need.

[24 : 18] And I'm just so thankful for you all. Yeah. I just love it here. I've got things ahead of me. And my mum has been diagnosed with Alzheimer's. So I know that I'm going to need support with this.

Yeah. Yeah. And I'm just so grateful that I've chose to come back to church and this church. Yeah. And I just want my husband to come along too. But he's not ready to come back yet.

But I just pray. I just pray he does. Yeah. And I just thank you all. Thank you all. You're just such a lovely church. Such a lovely family. And thank you. Thanks, Millie.

Yeah. And you are in the right place. You are in the right place. We just pray for your mum as well. And it's such a terrible disease that. And it robs people. But I pray that, Father, you are there.

You hold on to Millie's mum as this disease progresses. You give them all comfort. And a sense of belonging and being with you for as long as that can be.

[25 : 28] Thank you, Jesus. Amen. I just wanted to follow on from what Millie was saying about little friends. And it's making me emotional.

Thursday, for little friends, I know we keep talking about it, is the most incredible morning. We have so many mums and dads and carers and grandparents coming into the church. And there's always someone new every week.

And they all leave. And you can see that they feel really encouraged and really refreshed. And like they've been seen. And I didn't really understand.

I went to little friends with my little ones. And I didn't really appreciate that until we're now helping there. And it's honestly so overwhelming.

And we've made such wonderful friends, Millie and Ange. And having Barbara and Jane joining the team as well has been really special. So, yeah, I just, it's incredible. So, I just want to say well done, guys.

[26 : 27] It's great. Thanks, Millie. That is, yeah, a word of encouragement for the others here. I just wanted to encourage everyone here, particularly those doing the children's work.

We came here when Fionn was a baby. She's now coming up to 13. And our, those 13 years have been, would have been very different without you guys.

And I just wanted to encourage Ellen and Jack. Fionn's highlight is F&F; on a Monday. And as a parent of someone who's nearly a teen, to say that is brilliant.

She absolutely cannot focus her week without F&F.; She loves it. It starts her week off right. It grounds her for the week. She is such a little ambassador at school and so encouraging to her friends.

And I know that a lot of that is encouraged and nurtured at F&F;, as well as at home, obviously. But that group is just, I don't think you guys, I hope you guys know how important it is and how such an amazing job that you're doing.

[27 : 40] And likewise for those doing the other groups in church as well. So, just be encouraged and thanks, because we've got a really good team here. We're a good family. So, thanks. Thanks. Thanks. Thanks.

Thanks. Thanks. Thanks. Thanks. Thanks. Thanks. Thanks. Thanks. Thanks. Thanks. Ange. Thank you. That's, yeah, all the groups. It's so important, isn't it?

We don't realise just how much we're investing into people, how much a change you make. Sorry, there's another hand up. Oh, okay. Thanks. Just a quick one, actually. So, maybe a slightly different angle in case anyone else is feeling like this.

So, when the question of who encourages you first came up with Ian asked, I was a bit unsure what the answer was. And then Mark gave me a three-minute prologue of encouragement.

Because she's great like that. And I think, actually, on reflection, that comes from a place of not spotting it.

[28 : 40] So, I think, you know, the encouragement is only as good if the person is willing to receive it or spot it or hear it. And, yeah, you know, that's quite challenging for me sometimes.

Thanks, Jake. Thank you. Yeah, and you've got to receive it sometimes.

Last orders. I think just in the same vein, I'm Ange, by the way. Just in the same vein, as a lot of people here have been saying, the groups, the group leaders, everything that happens in this church, whether it be Christmas, Easter, the outreach in the community is absolutely amazing and vital.

And I'm just so proud to be a part of this church and to see everybody. There's always that one, isn't there? But in this church, there isn't that one, you know, that just disrupts everything or what have you.

And I've never been happier being here. We were discussing in our groups the fact that, you know, if I'm missing for a few weeks, I'm not relegated to the fringes. And, you know, I'm a nothingness.

[29 : 52] I'm still that wonderful person that you all make me feel, even if I don't feel it myself. But, yeah, definitely to the leaders, the volunteers, everything that goes on behind the scenes that we don't even know half about.

I'm grateful and I'm thankful and hopeful that I encourage people the way that they've encouraged me every step of my journey and my way. And it'd be far too many to mention by name.

But thank you and keep on doing what you all do so well. And those smiles are important. If you can't do anything else, that smile is brilliant and that hug. So thank you. Thank you to everyone.

Thank you, Ange. Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you.

[31 : 36] Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you. I have problems with self-worth at times. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you. Thanks, Barbara. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. and I can just see Mammy in her kitchen singing away. But there's one song and it's called A Hug in the Morning.

And it goes, we all need a hug in the morning and one at the end of the day. As many as possible squeezed in between to keep life's troubles at bay.

[32 : 54] No matter wherever you wander, your problems be great or be small. It is my belief for instant relief, a hug is the best cure of all.

And you know what? I really, even if sometimes you might not be here in person to get the physical hugs. But I really believe that even through, you know, like a phone call or message, you can really feel that whatever just drain away from you.

So hugs are so important. And just thanks for the hugs. Thank you, Anne.

Thank you. And just pick up what Barbara was saying about belonging. Because we're part, we are, I know there's a lot of us here and there's a lot that aren't here as well, but we're part of a family.

We are connected. Go for it, Mark. Can I just say, it's like, I'm very proud to say I'm Church Warden along with Nigel.

[34 : 07] But on behalf of both of us, it is such a joy to stand at those doors on Sundays and see you guys come in. So happy and pleased to be here.

You are hugged. You are loved. You are cared for. And I stand here and I look around. And there's so much joy in amongst everybody's life, the busyness of life, if you like.

But it's still so lovely that everyone's here. We have more than 100 most weeks. And it's joyous. It lifts me. It lifts Nigel, I'm sure. And as a team, it's brilliant.

And it's so lovely for people to speak out and say how they actually feel and what our church is doing for them in their lives.

So thank you. Thanks, Mark. Right. This really is last call.

[35 : 07] Anyone else want to share anything? Okay. Now we've heard some really encouraging things this morning. Let's just pray. Father, thank you for all that's been shared here this morning.

Thank you that we are part of your family and that you care for each one of us. That you hear our prayers. Thank you for all the good people and the good things that you bring into our lives.

may we be an encouragement to one another here but also to those that we know and that we spend time with.

And help us to be more and more each day aware of your presence in the places we find ourselves in, the people we meet. and when we just need to be still to just wait on you not to rush in.

And when, you know, when it's needed, Lord, that you prompt us, that you nudge us to have the courage to speak. Maybe, yeah, maybe it's just a hug or a word of encouragement just at the right moment.

[36 : 28] Lord, it's a difficult time. It's, in this country, it just seems to be such a hard time. As we face industrial action that we haven't seen probably for many decades, that was to have the grace and the patience to understand that many of those people involved in these actions are genuinely struggling financially as the cost of living crisis deepens.

And often it's not an easy but often, unfortunately, necessary choice. Thank you for the talks that are going on.

We pray for the understanding and reconciliation on both sides and a willingness for all parties to listen but to act justly as well, Lord.

I pray for all the nurses or the doctors or the medical and ancillary staff in the National Health Service and for all those in the RCN that are taking industrial action for the first time in their 106 year history, it just seems inconceivable.

Lord, something's broken. Would you bring wisdom? Would you bring patience and unity and commitment to those with authority and charged with trying to bring this all back together?

[38 : 09] Be in their midst as they speak. And we recognise that this isn't just about pay but for many the exhausting working conditions the physical, emotional, mental health strain that they are being put under day after day and then the impact that that has on morale.

Many of us have been on the receiving end of medical care and we're so grateful to all the expertise of all the nurses and doctors and all those who work in the NHS.

Just pray you would cover them. We pray for those who are waiting for care, maybe waiting for ambulances and vital medical needs.

We pray for your protection that they don't suffer. Lord, we pray for reconciliation that will be fair and just and beneficial to all sides.

in what's happening at the moment. We continue to pray for the people of Ukraine, Lord, protect them. I just, I find it it's just such a sense of heaviness, this senseless war that Russia continues to pursue.

[39 : 37] It just seems to grind on and on. It's so easy to see how it escalates with more missiles and tanks just fueling the conflict.

And for the people, the mums and the dads and the children and the brothers and the sisters, we just pray that there are safe places, that there's food, that there's heating, that there's lighting in the towns and cities that are continually being bombarded.

Would you give the people of Ukraine the strength and the courage to endure this and the hope to know that it will come to an end. Lord, may your peace reign in that country.

Lord, we pray for our own government, for the difficult kind of situation, tempted to say mess, that we find ourselves in.

We pray for those in authority that they would act with integrity and draw on your wisdom to protect the vulnerable, the poorest and the weakest in our society.

[41 : 02] Thank you for the generosity of those that contribute and help to run the different food banks up and down the country, the lifeline for many people with nowhere else to turn. Thank you for groups like Christians Against Poverty and the debt counselling that many churches are offering to support those in real need.

And then closer to home, Lord, we pray for Matt and Gemma. We pray for Matt's continued recovery and restoring back to full health, Lord.

We pray for Ruth and for James and the safe delivery of their first child. Surround them with love and protection.

Keep them all safe, Lord. And as their lives are about to be changed forever, in a good way, we love them.

thank you for all those involved in things like the drop-in, burn would be a friend, the pathway project, life for children, UCB, friends of Chase Terrace Park, all those groups making a difference in the people in our community and more widely.

[42 : 29] family. And then we pray for our own families and those we know who are finding things tough at the moment, maybe struggling financially or battling illness or mourning the loss of loved ones.

Lord, we ask for your comfort, your healing, your protection and love to surround all those in this time of need for them. Thank you, Lord.

Amen. So the band are going to lead us in a time of extended worship and if you feel you'd like someone to pray with you this morning, whatever it might be, maybe it's something that's been said or something that's shared or maybe it's something