

"The Ministry of Encouragement" | Rev. Tim Frickenschmidt | August 22, 2021

Acts 20:1-3, 6-12

After the uproar ceased, Paul sent for the disciples, and after encouraging them, he said farewell and departed for Macedonia. **2** When he had gone through those regions and had given them much encouragement, he came to Greece. **3** There he spent three months, and when a plot was made against him by the Jews as he was about to set sail for Syria, he decided to return through Macedonia... **6** but we sailed away from Philippi after the days of Unleavened Bread, and in five days we came to them at Troas, where we stayed for seven days. **7** On the first day of the week, when we were gathered together to break bread, Paul talked with them, intending to depart on the next day, and he prolonged his speech until midnight. **8** There were many lamps in the upper room where we were gathered. **9** And a young man named Eutychus, sitting at the window, sank into a deep sleep as Paul talked still longer. And being overcome by sleep, he fell down from the third story and was taken up dead. **10** But Paul went down and bent over him, and taking him in his arms, said, "Do not be alarmed, for his life is in him." **11** And when Paul had gone up and had broken bread and eaten, he conversed with them a long while, until daybreak, and so departed. **12** And they took the youth away alive, and were not a little comforted.

John 14:12-17

"Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes in me will also do the works that I do; and greater works than these will he do, because I am going to the Father. **13** Whatever you ask in my name, this I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. **14** If you ask me anything in my name, I will do it.

15 "If you love me, you will keep my commandments. **16** And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, **17** even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you.

Key Points and Discussion Questions from Tim's Sermon:

Introductory Discussion

Read the Scripture Passages at left. Tim's sermon explores what true encouragement looks like for believers in a fallen world. Reflect on how our culture views encouragement. How does our culture express the need for encouragement? Does it have any demands or ultimatums for who we are to encourage, or how we are to do so? How do you feel about those demands?

1. The Importance of Encouragement

Tim shares the Greek word for "Encouragement" used in the texts we have read: parakaleo.

- What is the literal translation for this word?
- Tim offered several Biblical interpretations for "parakaleo" or its derivatives in the Bible, such as "Helper" or Eugene Peterson's "Friend." What were some others that you remember? How are these interpretations connected, thematically?
- Reflect & Share: Being careful to protect confidences, describe a situation to the group where you feel the Lord might be calling you to "come alongside" someone in your life. How do you feel about it? If you were in that person's shoes, what would you need/want?
- Tim says that "The Ministry of Encouragement is important because it is God, it is who He is." What did he mean by that? Do you agree? Disagree? Discuss.
- True/False: The Ministry of Encouragement ought to be extended primarily between believers.
- Tim suggests that one of the reasons the Ministry of Encouragement is so important is because there is always tribulation, even brutality, in the lives of both believers and non-believers in this broken world. What are we to remember about the purpose of tribulation/trials? Why does this matter?
- True/False. Without many trials and tribulations, we will enter the Kingdom of God. Discuss.
- Tim makes an interesting, perhaps even odd commitment to the whole congregation about what he will not say to us if and when he "comes alongside" us in the midst of our acute trials. What commitment did he make? Why? How do you think he could justify "not saying" what we often expect pastors to say to those who are suffering? (Hint, what did he challenge us right now to never forget?)

1 Kings 17:8-9, 17-24

Then the word of the LORD came to him, **9** "Arise, go to Zarephath, which belongs to Sidon, and dwell there. Behold, I have commanded a widow there to feed you."...

17 After this the son of the woman, the mistress of the house, became ill. And his illness was so severe that there was no breath left in him. **18** And she said to Elijah, "What have you against me, O man of God? You have come to me to bring my sin to remembrance and to cause the death of my son!" **19** And he said to her, "Give me your son." And he took him from her arms and carried him up into the upper chamber where he lodged, and laid him on his own bed. **20** And he cried to the Lord, "O LORD my God, have you brought calamity even upon the widow with whom I sojourn, by killing her son?" **21** Then he stretched himself upon the child three times and cried to the LORD, "O LORD my God, let this child's life come into him again." **22** And the LORD listened to the voice of Elijah. And the life of the child came into him again, and he revived. **23** And Elijah took the child and brought him down from the upper chamber into the house and delivered him to his mother. And Elijah said, "See, your son lives." **24** And the woman said to Elijah, "Now I know that you are a man of God, and that the word of the LORD in your mouth is truth."

2. The Appearance of Encouragement

- True/False. The ministry of encouragement will often look (and feel) very strange. Consider the passage in First Kings at left as you make your case.
- Imagine yourself stretching your body over the body of a dead person while others were looking on. Imagine doing this not once, or twice, but three times.
 - What would you be feeling physically?
 - What would you be feeling emotionally?
- Tim suggests that these (somewhat grotesque) images are facsimiles of Jesus' ministry to us and this world. What did he mean by that? Do you believe that's true? Why or why not?
- Pause for a moment and silently reflect on how you have experienced this sort of ministry from Jesus in your life.
 - Being as specific as possible: how has Jesus met you "eye to eye, mouth to mouth, body to body" in a trial in your life?
 - How is meeting you now?
 - If you are willing to share, how do you need Him to come alongside you, now? Be as specific as possible. (e.g. "I need to talk to someone every day on the phone on the drive home from work.")

Closing Exercise

- Discuss amongst the group how you can come alongside those in your group who have expressed specific needs.
- Pray for one another, remembering those who have shared a specific calling to "come alongside" someone in their life who is suffering.