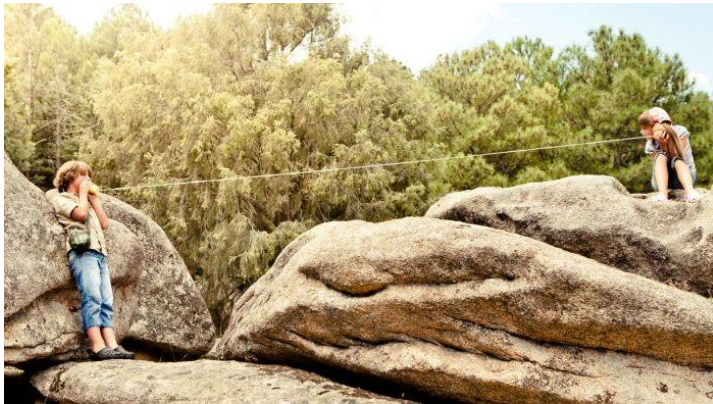


Be Mutually Encouraged

By: Rev. Mark Breese

Pastor Mark is the Agency Minister and the Director of Ministry & Community partnerships at Community Missions.



Many, many moons ago, a friend of mine (let's call her Sue) suddenly found herself in a long distance relationship. Her boyfriend (let's call him Tom) got a job in another state. It was too good of an opportunity to turn down.

The relationship was pretty serious and they were both pretty sure they were going to get married—as soon as Tom worked himself up to asking! They were going to stick with it. But this was pre-internet days, so it was all long phone calls, letters and the very, very occasional visit. I can tell you that it was hard for them. And just so you know, all the phone calls and letters worked. They are still together today.

Our current moment of “social distancing” reminds me of the Apostle Paul’s letters. As the followers of Jesus grew in the early days of the faith, letters were used to keep connections between Christian communities far from each other. Paul was a great writer of letters. In fact, the majority of the New Testament is made up of letters written by Paul and others. The letters were designed to teach and encourage people to remain firm in their faith, to address issues and differences that came up among them, and I think, to remind these distant communities that they were not alone—that they were united in their common belief in the newness of life found through Christ.

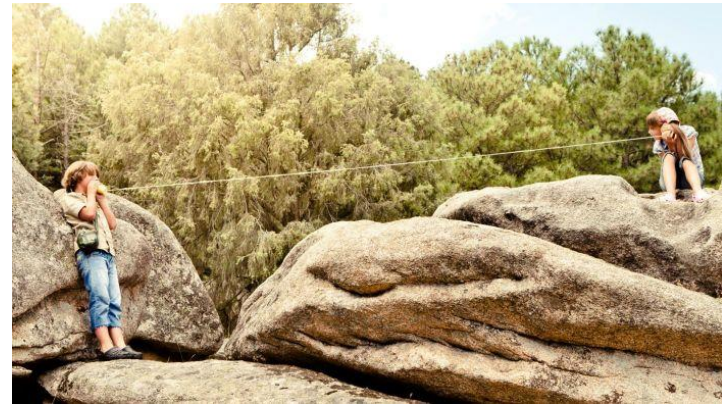
Romans 1:11-12

I long to see you so that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to make you strong— that is, that you and I may be mutually encouraged by each other’s faith.

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Romans 1:11-12

I long to see you so that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to make you strong— that is, that you and I may be mutually encouraged by each other’s faith.

“I long to see you so that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to make you strong,” Paul said at the start of his letter to the Christian community in Rome. He wanted to see them so that he and the Christians of Rome could be “mutually encouraged by each other’s faith.” But in the meantime, he sent this letter to start sharing that encouragement. Over two thousand years later... let’s just pause there and say it again... *over two thousand years later*, the same encouragement Paul and the Christians of Rome shared about their faith through this letter, encourages us today! That’s nothing to sneeze at!

Physical distance (because that is what “social distancing” means and does) from the family and friends we care about is difficult, and can make it hard to feel emotionally connected. I know that for some people, not being able to go to worship each week is causing a feeling of spiritual distance as well.

Paul said something else in his letter to the Romans that really speaks to us a people of faith today.

“Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will hardship, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? . . .No. . . For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.” (from Romans 8:35-39)

Those words are just as true today as they were two thousand years ago. People often wonder what difference words can make. When I read those words, I know my fears are eased and my heart is encouraged.

So, yea, we are keeping “social distance” from the ones we care about and love. And yea, that does make it hard to maintain relationships and makes us feel alone. But the cause is sufficient. We need to keep that *physical distance* to keep ourselves and others healthy. But *spiritual distance*, we can do the very opposite quite safely right now. Remember, Paul had no cell phone—just pen and paper were his tools—and yet he encourages our faith *from across the centuries!*

So, make those phone calls. Send those texts and emails. Tweet and post and Facetime and all that other stuff. We can and ought to “be mutually encouraged by each other’s faith” right now. If we follow Paul’s example, we will be ok and faith will grow in each of us. The “distance” is hard. But we can come through it—just like my friends Tom and Sue. And they did it without the internet!

Pastor Mark

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