

God has a plan for you: 1 Corinthians 16.10-24



Today's final TFTD from Corinth comes from Robin.

From Monday, we begin a new series of TFTD following the daily readings for Morning Prayer. And we're already planning the TFTD Advent Calendar for December — watch this space!

Paul's first letter to the Corinthians concludes by outlining some detailed plans for the ministry of individual church leaders.

When Paul made plans like this, they were all made within the framework of God's plan for him personally and for all humanity.

We are always struck reading Paul's writings and reading about his acts in the Acts of the Apostles by his astonishing strength and courage. It must have been quite an experience to be in his presence and to experience his leadership.

Paul was convinced that God had a plan for him. He was sure that God would keep him alive until he had achieved God's purpose for his life. And

this belief was sustained in turn by his faith in the bodily resurrection.

And so Paul was able to press on showing courage and strength and entering into new dangerous situations over and over again. Such was his faith in God's plan for him. He could face any persecution.

He expresses this attitude in his letter to the Philippians. *'Not that I have ... already reached my goal, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own.'* (Philippians 3:12).. Faith in God's plan liberates Paul from the fear that would otherwise prevent him from making his own plans.

How would our church fare today if it was faced with the bodily challenges and persecutions that Paul faced? How would our church leaders fare? Would we, would they, press on as Paul did, confident in God's purpose for the world?

I think most members of our church, including most of our leaders would buckle under the sort of pressure that Paul faced. The relatively recent example of the Lutheran church in Nazi Germany suggests this. Most of the church buckled under the pressure of the Nazi persecution.

But what is significant today is the fact that a few did not buckle but rather pressed on as Paul did. Bonhoeffer, Niemoller and other martyrs whose names we do not remember; it is their lives and their witness that turned out to be historically significant.

It is probably worth mentioning that Nazi persecution of the church took the form of a series of compromises and small innovations that church leaders were asked to make in order to go along with the 'new Germany' that the

Nazis were seeking to build. These compromises with state power and with the prevailing mood of the times were exactly the kind of compromises that Paul warns the church in Corinth against.

Niemoller turned out to be one of the most courageous church leaders of the time. But actually his opposition to the Nazis was not based on any particular objection to them as such. Indeed, their politics and his own nationalism were not so distant from each other. Niemoller's objection to Nazi church policy began in his principled opposition to introducing elements of Führer worship into the liturgy of the church. He pressed on with faith in God's plan and ended up in prison although in the end it suited God's purpose for him to survive and bear witness in post war Germany.

Let us learn the lesson that persecution begins with a series of reasonable sounding requests to compromise.

During my curacy, it was my great privilege to take part in a mission to Blackpool. While there, I worked alongside churches serving communities blighted by a particularly desperate form of poverty. Poor mental health, serious drug and alcohol abuse, domestic violence and involvement in the sex industry were all much in evidence in the lives of the people I met in these churches.

In one church in particular I remember being struck by how often people whose lives had been blighted by a combination of these things would tell me confidently that they now knew that God had a plan for them.

In communities like Alderley Edge, many of us have got used to making our own plans for our lives so this way of talking may seem alien. Poverty gives people far fewer opportunities to make plans in life. Poverty also

makes it more difficult to recover from those poor decisions that we all make from time to time.

When you are living a life where opportunities for you to make your own choices are few and far between, where you rarely get a chance to make a plan but have to live with the plans that other people impose upon you, it is an amazingly liberating feeling to grasp the possibility that God has a plan for you. It is a liberating feeling to grasp that God considers your life worthy of having a plan. It is so liberating, in fact, that you find that you are able to make your own plans and take more control of your own life, pressing on, as Paul wrote, because Christ has made you his own.

One of the most beautiful expressions of God's plan for all of us is Psalm 139.

*My frame was not hidden from you,
when I was made in secret and woven in the depths of the earth.
Your eyes beheld my form as yet unfinished;
already in your book were all my members written. (Psalm 139: 14-15)*

These words are not meant to be understood as the programme for God's robots on earth. They are words meant to liberate us from the fears that keep us from living our own lives in accordance with God's purpose.

Our life with Covid brings many choices and many decisions. We have to weigh up our own safety and our duty to love each other. Over and over again we have to decide whether we are going to get involved in something or just leave it be. These decisions are easier to make in the knowledge that God has a purpose for your life.

Keep alert, stand firm in your faith, be courageous, be strong. Let all that you do be in love.

(1 Corinthians 16:13-14)

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