**Courageous like Paul**

Fourteen of the books of the New Testament are attributed to Paul, though he may have only personally written about half of these, with others possibly written on his behalf – though there is little doubt that Hebrews, once ascribed to Paul, was not written by him. Paul’s writings were all letters, written to individuals or churches with advice and doctrine. They were not gospels or stories of Jesus’ life – in fact Paul barely mentions much of the teachings of Jesus, instead focusing on the Last Supper (1 Corinthians 11:17-34), Jesus’ crucifixion and resurrection (1 Corinthians 15).

There is plenty to choose from to read about Paul – either reading his own words, or by reading the book of Acts. In Acts, Luke tells the story of Paul’s travels, along with those of the well-known disciples such as Peter.

Paul first appears as Saul, a devout Jew and a Roman citizen, involved in the movement to stamp out the followers of Christ. He was devout (Galatians 1:13-14), first appearing in Acts 7:58, a young man watching the stoning of Stephen. That is until he meets with the risen Jesus on the road to Damascus (Acts 9:1-19).

Paul is courageous in his sharing the good news and spreading the word about Jesus Christ. Having persecuted the early Christians, he is brave enough to return to them and discuss Jesus with them – this was not always easy, especially as Paul believed he was called to take the good news to the gentiles or non-Jews (Galatians 2) and led to debates about Jewish food laws and circumcision (Acts 15).

Q – how brave are we when faced with people we don’t always agree with?

Q – how brave are we when we challenge the status quo – getting people to do things differently – perhaps worship, church, community life?

Paul is courageous in taking the good news to many places within Asia Minor, challenging their ways of thinking and living together. He often was very blunt about things that they were doing wrong and things that they needed to change (for example 2 Corinthians 6).

Q – how brave are we when it comes to challenging others in love?

Paul is courageous in keeping going in his ministry regardless of what happens to him. He is imprisoned more than once (Acts 27:1-12) though he always uses his experiences to talk about God (Philippians 1). He continued despite being shipwrecked several times (Acts 27:15-16 and 2 Corinthians 11:25), being mocked and taunted (Acts 17), and having some kind of ailment that doesn’t leave him (2 Corinthians 12:6-7). Even in his final imprisonment in Rome, which he knows will end in his death, Paul still encourages other believers (2 Timothy 4:7). We don’t know how Paul died, but it is believed that he was beheaded by the Romans after a few years in prison.

Q – how brave are we in proclaiming Jesus Christ when life is difficult?

Q – what stumbling blocks do we put in our way of sharing the gospel?

Many people have a love/hate relationship with Paul, some of his teachings trouble us and others inspire us. Feel free to share a teaching of Paul that either inspires or troubles you for others to discuss.