

Handwritten Letters

How many of you have a memory box stuffed with old texts or Facebook posts? It's not that you can't be encouraged by a meme or a Snapchat, but these other forms of engagement just aren't the same as a handwritten letter.

Michael Sull, Ronald Reagan's calligrapher put it this way, "Without question, the sharing of thoughts through your own written word is the most personal conveyance of visible language. Its image is a window to the human heart and allows us a glimpse of the writer's soul."

While doing some studying this week I read this passage from Colossians 2:1-5,

"For I want you to know how great a struggle I have for you and for those at Laodicea and for all who have not seen me face to face, that their hearts may be encouraged, being knit together in love, to reach all the riches of full assurance of understanding and the knowledge of God's mystery, which is Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. I say this in order that no one may delude you with plausible arguments. For though I am absent in body, yet I am with you in spirit, rejoicing to see your good order and the firmness of your faith in Christ."

Paul was in "in chains" and unable to physically be with the Colossians, yet he wanted these brothers and sisters to know that he was most certainly in the struggle with them. Though he couldn't see them face to face, he strived to demonstrate his love for them by writing a letter to them. Much could be said about the letter and all of what Paul was attempting to accomplish through it, but from this snippet, as one commentator puts it, "He begins to open his heart, and share with them his special hopes and concerns for their future". His desire was to lovingly encourage them, not through a physical hug or kiss, but through the intimacy of words.

Interestingly in the Greek, the word for encouragement used in the passage includes the concept of "calling near". So you might say that when they received the letter and read it, they were brought a bit nearer to Paul and to his heart for them. Pretty cool huh?

Because their trials and struggles were real, Paul wanted to assure them that he was not passively distant, but actively working to draw a bit nearer through the power of a letter.

His delivery method emphasized this even further. Colossians 4:7-9 says,

"Tychicus will tell you all about my activities. He is a beloved brother and faithful minister and fellow servant in the Lord. I have sent him to you for this very purpose, that you may know how we are and that he may encourage your hearts, and with him Onesimus, our faithful and beloved brother, who is one of you. They will tell you of everything that has taken place here."

Paul removed any doubt that his words of love, concern, and encouragement were sincere and true by sending two beloved brothers Tychicus and Onesimus who were at the same time faithful servants of the Lord with Paul and also fellow countrymen of the Colossians (from the province of Asia and “one of you”). As a result, they were uniquely equipped to intimately reinforce this “message of God’s mystery, which is Christ” to the people of Colossae.

This model - delivering intimate letters through the hands of beloved brothers who could confirm the heartfelt, authentic content - reminds me of how God himself has graciously dealt with mankind. From the onset of the fall, God communicated to man largely through the power of his words. These loving words were intended to restore right relationship with Him, to draw man near again. These words were regularly delivered by faithful messengers used to confirm the truth of what God said. But in the fullness of time, God sent his one and only son, the Word become flesh, to confirm without doubt that what God said was sincere and true. Isn’t that beautiful?

This year, Berean will be sending an elder to visit at least one of our missionary families in person. Perhaps between now and then, you could sharpen your quill, dust off the old ink well, and find a piece of parchment to craft a letter to our beloved co-laborers in the faith. Give them a window to your heart for them, how you struggle hand in hand though you may not be physically present. Could you imagine how encouraging it would be to receive multiple handwritten letters delivered by a beloved Berean messenger who could then reinforce the content of those letters through personal reinforcement? Your letter would be a wonderful way to express your desire to “call near”. And I am sure it would fill them with joy and be a significant encouragement to their faith.

I am going to give it a try, how about you?

Pastor Brad

P.S. The irony is not lost on me that this pastoral encouragement is coming to you electronically 😊