

# STPAUL'S D O R K I N G

*a growing community of grace*

## **1 Peter: Living a 'new normal' as God's people** (*Autumn 2020*)

"Come, follow me" was Jesus' call to his first disciples, a call to a new – and radically different – life. And as we have been exploring over the summer months in our journey through the middle part of Matthew's Gospel, he sends out that same invitation today to each of us.

If we respond "yes", what does 'living out this new life' look like, individually and as a group of disciples? What becomes our 'new normal' as God's people? The first letter of Peter has a lot to say that can help us with this question, and so we will be working our way steadily through it together during September to November.

The apostle Peter is identified at the very beginning of the letter as the author. Some modern scholars question this, arguing that the Greek vocabulary used was beyond that of an uneducated fisherman – however, Peter seems to have had assistance in the actual writing, with Silas (Silvanus), Paul's companion on his 'second missionary journey' (Acts 15-18), specifically mentioned in 5:12.

The letter was most likely written from Rome (codenamed 'Babylon' in 5:13), shortly before the beginning of the systematic persecution of Christians under the Emperor Nero (during which Peter himself was martyred), and in anticipation of a more general increase in discrimination and suffering. The original recipients were Christians scattered throughout Asia Minor (now Turkey).

Peter writes in order to encourage the believers to "stand fast" in "the true grace of God" (5:12). He begins by declaring how this grace brings us hope, calls us to holiness and makes us 'living stones' in the house of God's new people (2:9: "...a royal priesthood, a holy nation..."), solidly built on the 'cornerstone' of Jesus Christ. The letter then goes on to explore how this grace is to be worked out in the nitty-gritty of life – in our words and actions, in the community and in the home, in trouble and in joy.

Right up front (in 1:1, and then also in 1:17 and 2:11), Peter addresses his readers as "strangers" or "exiles", indicating that as Christians they were living outside their true homeland. They were to be highly distinctive, living out a 'new normal' which would witness to and "win over" outsiders (2:12, 3:1-2, 3:16).

Perhaps. living in a country where Christianity has been the established religion for hundreds of years, we have not always felt ourselves to be 'exiles' in quite the same way. But I'm sure we can all identify ways in which that might be changing, and there is certainly something of a feeling of being in unfamiliar territory at present with all the upheaval resulting from COVID-19.

The PCC has recently agreed on four particular foci for St Paul's over the coming months as we seek to establish a 'new normal' for us as God's people at this time. These four foci relate to our services, small groups, community links and prayer life. We can look forward to 1 Peter speaking into each of these areas in the weeks ahead.