6pm Evensong Sunday 18 October 2026
Colossians 4:7-end – ***Good communication fosters the connections that can build a community working for the kingdom of God***

This week Facebook (now Meta) has been in the news again with the release of the film *The Social Reckoning*, with Jeremy Strong as Mark Zuckerberg, preparing to give his testimony to a Senate hearing. The film is the story of how Frances Haugen switched sides, from being a strong supporter of Facebook's original purpose, to being the whistleblower who gave The Wall Street Journal copies of the documents they needed to publish The Facebook Files which exposed Facebook's cynical management practices to maximise profit, despite knowing the devastating impact that their algorhythms were having on people's health and wellbeing and on society as a whole.

Frances Haugen became a whistleblower because she really believed in the importance of good communication and in the power to connect people for the sake of individual and public good. As Frances Haugen put it in her testimony to a Senate hearing, ***"I joined Facebook because I think Facebook has the potential to bring out the best of us"***.

Frances Haugen, Mark Zuckerberg, Elon Musk…., all of the people behind Meta, and X, and all the other social media networks…. they all understand the power of enabling people to connect with one another, and so should we.

The apostle Paul was completely convinced that **good communication will develop the connections that build community**. In our reading from Paul's letter to the church in Colosse we are given a window into Paul's network of what Paul describes as ***co-workers for the kingdom of God***. In our reading, we heard how the work of **communicating information, instructions and ideas was shaping a community that would help to build the Kingdom of God**.

Communicating, connecting, creating community; here is the church in action, and there is much we can learn from how Paul writes about his network of co-workers.

Frances Haugen believed that Facebook could bring out the best in people; but it is Paul's network of ***fellow servant[s] in the Lord*** who were, through prayer and the work of the Spirit, fulfilling ***the potential to bring out the best of us.***

Let's start with Tychicus. Paul says that Tychicus is the one who ***will tell you all the news about me … so that you may know how we are and that he may encourage your hearts***. Paul had said the same thing about Tychicus in his letter to the Ephesians: Tychicus is sent to the Ephesians ***to let you know how we are and to encourage your hearts.*** Tychicus would also be sent by Paul to Titus on the island of Crete.

This time, Paul is also sending to the church in Colosse Onesimus, Philemon's slave, ***to tell you about everything here.*** Commentators have worked out that "here" was probably Rome. Paul intends that what he writes ***may encourage your hearts.*** Doubtless there would have been people amongst the church in Colosse who would have been wanting to know how Paul was managing, because Paul had been very much the traveller from one church plant to another, but now he is confined to prison.

And so Paul wants people to know that he doesn't feel alone. He writes warmly of his colleagues, describing his three Jewish colleagues as ***co-workers for the kingdom of God****.* Aristarchus is not just a co-worker but a ***fellow prisoner.*** Epaphras is a ***servant of Christ.***

It was Epaphras who first brought the gospel to Colosse, and Epaphras continues to be ***striving in his prayers on [their] behalf*** and has been ***working hard for*** the church in Colosse, as well as those in Laodicea (12 miles west of Colosse), and Hierapolis (15 miles north-west of Colosse), all three cities being significant commercial and industrial centres located on important Roman roads.

Paul writes also of Luke, who had been a regular travelling companion, and of Demas. But Paul also connects with people he has not met. Although there's no evidence of Paul himself ever having visited Colosse, Paul sends greetings to

Nympha, who has a church that meets in her house, and to Archippus, telling him he is to ***complete the task that you have received in the Lord.***

This letter gives us a peek into the ups and downs of Paul's relationships with his co-workers. We can tell from this letter that Paul and Mark, the cousin of Barnabas, had clearly patched up the disagreement between them. It had been a disagreement ***so sharp that they [had] parted company***, prompting Barnabas to take Mark away with him to Cyprus whilst Paul had set off with Silas for Syria. We can discover from Paul's other letters that Demas, on the other hand, wasn't always on the best of terms with Paul.

But there are other things that Paul writes about in this letter that have to remain a mystery. We don't know what Paul meant when he referred to the Colossians having received ***instructions concerning Mark***. And we don't know anything about the task that Archippus had ***received in the Lord*** and that Paul was so concerned that he should complete. Nor do we know anything about the letter to the Laodiceans that Paul wanted to be exchanged for this letter to the Colossians; we can only assume that it is now lost to us.

What we do see is that Paul is using his network of workers who are delivering his letters to communicate the information, and the instructions, and the ideas, that are going to be needed to grow and develop this new community of followers of Jesus, scattered throughout the cities of Greece and Asia Minor, and the islands of the Eastern Mediterranean. We can see that it is by communicating and connecting that Christians can build community.

If you pause to have a look at the lobby display, you'll see what we're trying to communicate this week. Each month, we're grateful to our lobby display team for putting together a display that helps us to think how we can connect the people around us in this part of Cambridge.

Today is Gift Day, when we aim to pay some attention to what God might be saying to us about how we steward the resources that he gives us, and how we can put to good use such money as we are able to give, according to our means, to the work of St John's here in this part of Cambridge. If you look at

this month's display you'll see that we're raising funds so that we can switch towards a more energy-efficient power supply that will help us to work towards Carbon Net Zero. We're reaching out to others to help us to do this.

Communicating the message is a very important part of building community, and in his letter to the Colossians Paul gives us a good sense of how this is to be done. Our communications with one another can be warm, direct and personal. Paul shows us that we are to be looking for the ways in which we can ***encourage our hearts***.

And like Epaphras, we are to be generous in our recognition of all that we do in prayer for one another, so that we may ***stand mature and fully assured in everything that God wills.*** We are to ***work hard***, and to be persistent, so that, like Archippus, we might ***complete the task***.

Paul's letters to the Colossians and his letters to the other churches show us that we are very far from being cogs in a machine. We are individuals, very much appreciated for our different roles, each of us having a part to play, as ***co-workers for the kingdom of God.***