

I was watching the coverage of the inauguration of the President from America last week and one moment in it took me a bit by surprise. It really did catch me emotionally - it was the installation of the vice president Kamala Harris.

In that moment of installation she represented more than she is herself. As a woman, however gifted, she represented a sign of some hope and encouragement beyond her own person in a time of difficulty. We saw the potential for someone who, hitherto would never have been in the position she was in, being placed with the great responsibility that she now carries.

All this set me thinking about the fact that each of us needs glimpses of things that give us encouragement at this time. Of course, for Christians the word encouragement should make us go to our scriptures and indeed it probably for some of us will make us think quite quickly about Saint Barnabas, known as the son of encouragement, the one who was known for bringing encouragement to others.

To be encouraged literally means to give heart, or to strengthen in a way that takes somebody forward. I think that is a very important part of our calling as Christians right now each and every one of us needs to have that Barnabas element about us if we possibly can. Most people are finding these extended times of the pandemic hard. All of us are finding it really difficult as we face the prospect of more weeks ahead with restrictions and separation from loved ones. We need to be encouraged by the signs we see around us; those glimpses of the things that God has in store for His people. Christians should always be looking for those glimpses of what we call the Kingdom -those signs of encouragement around us but I wonder if I could encourage you with me to be encouragers of others. What might this mean?

Perhaps remembering in ways that sometimes we all let slip to be encouraging of people who support us. People who go out of their way to look after us. People who look after our families whether that's teachers, carers in care homes, neighbours who perhaps in some very small yet significant ways. It could be people who deliver goods to us, maybe those who do things that are so helpful in a particular moment. The question is, can we seek to be those children of encouragement in God's family, those who encourage one another to remember to say the kind word and remember to look for those glimpses of hope and point others to them?

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