

## **THE STARTING PLACE**

How big does something have to become before we're willing to call it *suffering*? Why isn't the answer the same for everyone everywhere?

## **LISTENING TO ACTS**

Often, Paul found himself beaten and arrested for preaching. In [Acts 17:22–31](#), he is in Athens, a city of many gods, far from the shared assumptions of Jerusalem. In the middle of such risks, how does Paul hold together finding common ground with his listeners and remaining distinctive about the God we meet in Jesus?

## **LISTENING TO THE GOSPEL**

Read Jesus speaking to his disciples in [John 14:15-21](#). What does his promise of the Advocate suggest about the struggles his followers would face when he is no longer physically with them?

## **LISTENING TO PETER**

Read 1 Peter 5:1–5 below.

How does Peter recommend we build community?

Now as an elder myself and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as one who shares in the glory to be revealed, I exhort the elders among you to tend the flock of God that is in your charge, exercising the oversight, not under compulsion but willingly, as God would have you do it — not for sordid gain but eagerly. Do not lord it over those in your charge but be examples to the flock. And when the chief shepherd appears, you will win the crown of glory that never fades away. In the same way, you who are younger must accept the authority of the elders.\* And all of you must clothe yourselves with humility in your dealings with one another, for 'God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble.'

## **THE THRESHOLD**

In John 14 Jesus spoke to his disciples together, even though English only gives us the single word 'you' where other languages distinguish between singular and plural. He knows that the struggles ahead have the power to bring them together. Peter has just described something of that community in reality. The momentum here is about the unexpected blessing that comes with struggle — suffering as the condition, community as the life that forms within it. Why is it that shared hardship so often draws people into community? Where have you known this to be true?

## **MOVING FORWARD**

Communities often take shape in difficult seasons, when people discover that they need one another. Peter describes a pattern of life in which people care for one another, lead by example, accept guidance, and clothe themselves with humility. The French priest Michel Quoist once prayed, "Lord, grant that I may be a meeting place." In other words, a person through whom others can find connection and belonging. As you carry these readings with you this week, first take a moment to notice where others have already made space for you — times when someone's kindness, welcome, or patience helped draw you into community. And then ask yourself where you might offer that same gift to someone else.

## A Prayer for this Week

*Trinity of love, as your people you call us to live close to you: guide us by your Spirit of truth wherever we go — in busy places and quiet ones, in easy times and hard ones; so that through us your love may reach the hearts of people everywhere, through Jesus Christ our brother. Amen.*

**There are ABIDE groups this week at the Vicarage**

**WEDNESDAY 13<sup>TH</sup> MAY AT 7PM**

**FRIDAY 16<sup>TH</sup> MAY AT 10.30AM**