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Shortly after I moved to the UK (nearly 15 years ago) I fell in love – with Marmite. It was a world-opening discovery. Given the chance, I will use it on just about everything. Only later did I learn how contentious it is, which is certainly the case in my own household. I also learned that 'Marmite' can be used as an adjective. Bracing, divisive, evoking strong and wide-ranging reactions: It's a brilliant description.

A few years ago, I heard someone describe Paul as a 'Marmite theologian'. For many people today, including many of you in this congregation, this feels right. When we read his letters, we find that Paul runs the gamut from exasperating to inspiring, and everything in between. I think it's safe to say that Paul was 'a bit Marmite' in his own time, too.

This morning's New Testament reading comes from a letter that Paul wrote to the people of Corinth, in south central Greece. Previously, he had visited the city to spread the story of Christ. His visit to Corinth followed in the wake of a far less successful trip to Athens, where Paul had tried – and largely failed – to impress with his cleverness and his knowledge of Greek philosophy. Despite his efforts (or, perhaps, because of them), Paul left Athens with few converts. Reading between the lines, and what we know of him, his approach may have alienated people. Like I said: Marmite.

But love him or loathe him, Paul was nothing if not a learner. These days, we might say that he engaged in 'reflective practice', which is a trendy term for a very simple, very powerful concept. In other words, Paul lived,

and he learned. After Athens, he would do things differently.

In this letter to the people of Corinth, Paul recalls his visit to their city: *"When I came to you, brothers and sisters, I did not come proclaiming the mystery of God to you in lofty words or wisdom ... I came to you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling. My speech and my proclamation were not with plausible words of wisdom, but with a demonstration of the Spirit."*

I wish that more people today would heed Paul's example here. What good are 'lofty words' if they don't land for their listeners? What good is clever language if it doesn't lead to greater understanding? As listeners, what hope have we to develop wisdom, if we can't hack our way through the words to the meaning? There are some wonderful exceptions, of course, but card-carrying theologians are among the worst offenders.

It's tempting to leave any word ending in 'ology' to the experts, to assume that we have nothing to bring to the table. When it comes to theology, it can be easy for us to believe that God's wisdom is best revealed to those who hold fancy academic degrees, or who preach from a pulpit, or who carry their cleverness with confidence. It can be easy to assume that the route to theology is a narrow pathway, involving rigorous study, ancient manuscripts, and incomprehensible dissertations about the number of angels that can fit on the head of a pin.

I want to challenge these perceptions. Theology, I would argue, belongs to us all. The Greek origins of the word suggest as much. Theology combines 'Theo' (or God), and 'logos', which can translate as 'word', or

‘speech’. So, theology is: ‘God-speech’. It is about God speaking to us and through us, into the world. At its best, theology is a broad landscape, with many viewpoints. It is multiple. It is plural. Really, we should be talking about theologies. And it is the activity of the whole people of God.

To be a theologian is, simply, to be a person who reflects on God’s presence in the world. From a Christian perspective, this also means seeking understanding of the Gospels, from the story of Jesus’s life, death and resurrection, and gleaning insight into how we should live. A theologian is someone who helps us to marvel at the mystery of God – to reflect on God’s outpouring of love into a fragile, fractured world.

There are infinite ways we can develop as theologians. We can do this by spending time with Scripture: praying with it, puzzling over it, questioning and challenging and cherishing it. Here at St James’s, our regular Gospel Conversations are a wonderful way to do this.

We can also develop as theologians by learning about other religions, bringing with us a spirit of open-minded curiosity. Over the past three years, I have had the great privilege of learning about theologies of migration in Islam and Judaism. Perhaps another time, I will share some of this experience with you. For now, I want to say that I learned so much about Christianity through this process. By immersing myself in and learning from our sister religions, through the lens of migration, I came to a far deeper understanding of my own Christian experience and the theologies that sustain it.

And we can develop as theologians by travelling together. Here at St James’s, Piccadilly, we take this seriously. As it says on the website, this church hopes to ‘create a space where people of any faith or none can question and discover the sacred in life through openness, struggle, laughter and prayer’.

This is the work of theology – this journeying of question and discovery. And it’s work that we are committed to doing in community. In a few weeks’ time, we will begin a new experiment, called Camino Companions. It takes its name from the 12-week Camino course that we run, from Advent (in December) to the Feast of the Ascension (in May).

Over the past 8 years, many of you have taken the Camino course; perhaps some of you are thinking of taking it in the future. In the meantime, Camino Companions is an opportunity for us to come together, initially on Wednesday evenings during Lent and through Easter. Everyone is welcome – whether or not you have taken the Camino course, whether or not you intend to in the future. You are welcome if you have been worshipping here for decades, or if today is your first time.

On Wednesday evenings, we will gather for silence and a simple Eucharist, followed by a time of discussion and sharing in smaller groups. Perhaps this might take the form of silence, or reading Scripture together. Perhaps we might explore our personal, everyday actions and the choices we make. We might ask ourselves, and each other, how we can live with integrity amidst the pressing demands of 21st century London.

As we go along, we might seek to develop a ‘rule of life’ that we can follow, together. Through Camino Companions, we will learn from each other, challenge each other, support each other. We will reflect together, to discern God at work in our lives, in this community, in the world.

In short, we will develop our living theologies – not by racking up a list of achievements and accolades, or through taking exams, but through living and learning, and through listening for the voice of God in the process.

It is not lofty words but the Spirit that enables Paul to communicate to the people of Corinth the mystery of God and the crucified Christ. It is through the Spirit that he – and we – may understand God at work in our human lives. We hold tight to Paul's promise that we will grow in faith, toward spiritual maturity. And as we do, our theologies will develop with us.

More than ever, the world needs our theologies, our understanding of 'God-speech'. With the climate in crisis, and the

uncertainties of Brexit, and the ever-deepening divisions between the haves and the have-nots, it is vital that we recognize the presence of God, in as many shapes and forms and ways that we can.

Theology is everyone's responsibility.

Like Paul with the Corinthians, writing from that humble, awestruck place, may we never cease to learn from living. For it is here that we find the heart of theology: God-speech.

Amen.