***“For we live by faith, not by sight”***

**(2 Corinthians 5.7)**

**[Creating Confidence; Inspiring faithfulness]**

In talking to school leaders about the most pressing issues keeping them awake at night, some common themes emerge. While presented in various orders (often depending on the school’s current Ofsted designation), the trio of Budget, Accountability Measures and Recruitment & Retention is mentioned by most. The notion of ‘retention’ is an interesting leadership as the word itself has some rather unintended consequences. The very word implies a holding onto, an assumption that the colleague may be better off leaving the first place, but that a series of extrinsic factors could sway the deal.

**The reality is that great teachers and leaders don’t generally want to be retained – that’s not how they choose to stay working somewhere.** This kind of committed colleague sticks around because their leaders or institutions are successful at first **‘creating confidence’** (recruitment) and then through lived experience, **‘inspiring faithfulness’** (retention) to a shared vision or direction. This notion of faithfulness does not simply mean remaining, obeying, repeating – plan, teach, mark, repeat – but rather speaks of someone who is full of faith, a description that can only be evidenced by words and actions. Even the word confidence is drawn from the same root from which we derive the word ‘fidelity’ – the idea of having full trust or reliance, despite not being able to see everything one would like to.

Paul is writing in a crisis of his own leadership, and seems to be simultaneously trying to re-assure his readers that they can and should trust him, and attempting to convince himself that the foundations of his ministry lie in faith not simply outward signs and measurements. Everything is not in order, the external indicators are not secure – there are questions to be asked. Rigorous evaluation and probing investigation is underway and **there is simply not enough to see to be 100% sure** **of the future.**

It is easy to think that Paul, a great leader and church planter of the early church, had it all together – that he knew the journey and that his RAG-rated action plan was generally turning green at all his review meetings. However, while he clearly lived with a deeply rooted sense of vocation, strategic intent and passionate resourcefulness, it is also evident that his journey (as documented in the Book of Acts) was frequently subject to unexpected twists and turns, some good, but largely mainly challenging. And yet, despite all of this, he claims to ‘live by faith and not by sight’.

One of Martin Luther King’s many enduring qualities as a leader was the ability to do the same – to imagine the possible and then to pursue it, despite any certainty of achievement of the goal. He famously writes: **“Faith is taking the first step even when you don’t see the whole staircase.”** Developing this kind of faithfulness in our teams is not simply about mindless optimism and always seeing every glass as full, but focusing on the possible, and equipping and investing in our colleagues to prioritise that which we can’t see.

**[Living by faith]**

This is the very nature of great teaching – trusting that as you lead young people’s learning journeys, that they will be equipped and inspired to walk by faith – to try things they cannot yet do – and not by sight – to be defined by what it in front and around them. This is what the Church of England Vision for Education means by ‘*opening horizons of hope and guiding people into ways of fulfilling them’*. Faith-full pedagogy seeks to move a class towards the possible, with ambition and aspiration, not knowing for certain the outcome, but moving nonetheless. Faith-full leadership draws on personal vocation and resilience to travel together towards the possible in our schools and communities. It is compelling and attractive in a teacher, energising young people and catalysing their learning. It is equally compelling in leader – where **the faith-full leader inspires faithfulness in those they lead.**

Living by faith and not by sight is what encourages us to ‘press on’ as Paul writes later in the chapter in Verse 14. It encourages to take the first step, or to leave the shore, heading towards a new horizon. In his book Paul for Everyone, NT Wright writes:

*“The energy to get up and go on [as a Christian, as one who works for the gospel, therefore, comes not from a cold sense of duty, not from a fear of being punished if you don’t do your bit, but from the warm-hearted response of love to the love which has reached out, reached down, and reached you.”*

It is easy to mis-read this talk of faith as being a gung-ho, energetic leadership, that sweeps into difficult situations and by force of nature and positivity alone compels and excites colleagues to pursue the dream. It puts everything on the leader, and although a leader’s passion, skills and commitment are of course important, they are not everything, and **we need to work together to avoid the ‘super-leader’ mentality in portraying unhelpful notions of the hero who fixes everything.** That is not real life, and it is not true, however many leadership courses we go on. While we could recognise Paul as one of the most significant leaders of his time, and perhaps the history of Christianity, he is primarily writing about being faith-full, or **leading with faithfulness from a position of vulnerability and humility.**

He certainly writes with passion, but it is a passion for God emerging in our most challenging times, not through our greatest successes. While he may not be advertising failure as the ideal, he is writing from a place of recognising that **our faith and character is shaped, defined and refined in the crucible of difficult experiences.** However, our ego prefers just about anything to failing. We don’t seek it, and yet we are judged for it. Our darkest moments as leaders are also our most fertile periods of growth if we allow them to be, and as Richard Rohr writes:

*“It takes a foundational trust to fall or to fail – and not fall apart.* ***Faith alone holds you*** *while you stand waiting and hoping and trusting.”*

So, as leaders seeking to live by faith in challenging circumstances, let us be vulnerable, confident in the knowledge that we are being shaped by our situation, our character and credibility refined by the difficulty, and our resilience thus being grown through our ability to take the next step. It may be that living by faith – leading faith-fully – is central to Educating for Hope and Aspiration, to creating confidence and inspiring faithfulness, rather than simply trying to retain people who were never designed to be.

**[Questions for Discussion]**

1. What practical things can you do as a leader to create confidence and inspire faithfulness, both in recruitment processes, and with your established teams?
2. How might you describe your own faith journey to other people – how normal is it to talk about faith in your context?
3. How could the example of Jesus help us think about vulnerability and humility in leadership (see also Philippians 2.5-11)
4. What examples of ‘faith holding you’ when things fall apart can you share? How foundational is this to you as a leader, and to your team? What are the challenges of living by faith and not by sight?