

Daily Update Feb 3rd

Hello everybody, I hope you are safe and well. A testing passage from Hebrews, do get in touch if it provokes you!

Love in Christ

Matt

Heb 12:4–7, 11–13

⁴ *In your struggle against sin, you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood.* ⁵ *And have you completely forgotten this word of encouragement that addresses you as a father addresses his son? It says,*

'My son, do not make light of the Lord's discipline,

and do not lose heart when he rebukes you,

⁶ *because the Lord disciplines the one he loves,*

and he chastens everyone he accepts as his son.'

⁷ *Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as his children. For what children are not disciplined by their father? ⁸ If you are not disciplined – and everyone undergoes discipline – then you are not legitimate, not true sons and daughters at all. ⁹ Moreover, we have all had human fathers who disciplined us and we respected them for it. How much more should we submit to the Father of spirits and live! ¹⁰ They disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but God disciplines us for our good, in order that we may share in his holiness. ¹¹ No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it.*

¹² *Therefore, strengthen your feeble arms and weak knees. ¹³ 'Make level paths for your feet,' so that the lame may not be disabled, but rather healed.*

One characteristic of this lockdown seems to be more TV, more snacks and less exercise. It might be the weather, the general malaise, the limited time we have to be outdoors, but overall it somehow seems tougher. Someone on the Churchdads' group sent me a list of new lockdown rules, which included socially distancing from the fridge. Good advice. If only there was someone else to enforce it!

The writer of Hebrews is making an important point about remaining faithful when it gets tough. It looks likely that opposition outside the church could be calling them to martyrdom (v4) and the church was losing sight of God's love toward them. We know we frequently wrestle with our own chaos inside and the world's chaos outside so the writer is encouraging them because they are discouraged, for feeble arms and weak knees are reminders of low spirits. I wonder if you have felt like that.

This Sunday, apart from the highlight of St John's virtual church, is Superbowl Sunday. It's not everyone's cup of tea, but this year is exceptional. Quarterback Tom Brady, now aged 43, and playing in his tenth Superbowl in his twenty year career is hoping for his seventh Superbowl win. Even if you cut his career into quarters, he would still be the greatest quarterback ever. American Football is heavily structured against such dominance. So how has he done it? How does he turn setbacks into steps forward?

The key has been his working relationship coach Bill Belichick. For over twenty years he has coached Brady in his strengths and his weaknesses. He has pointed out flaws, blind spots

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and shortened thinking so that Brady was always a step ahead and able to adapt to every situation as best as possible. Brady is not flawless, by any means, but without Belichick's insight and commitment, he would certainly not be the player he is. Still playing at the highest level for twenty plus years, with more in the tank when he could have cruised comfortably on his previous results, he could easily have said, that'll do. But most of the work is done in the off season, hard preparation, fine tuning and refining.

The writer identifies, verse 11 among others, that we do not like to be prepared. Trials are not inherently more powerful if we are prepared, but we are less able to act well if we are unprepared.. As a church we have had to raise our game, to find or bring fellowship to one another, but to do so is to bring God's word (Prov 3:11-12 cited above) to his children, to encourage, discipline and prepare us for whatever lies ahead we have been taught new things about compassion and steadfastness.

Never forget that through trials we are being prepared. The writer sees God as a father wanting us to be the best we can be, not just delighting in our successes, but picking us up after our failures. One day. He will reveal to us the depth of our mess, but for now he works with us, warts and all, preparing us to be part of his new creation, (Rom 8:28-29). Each day when we read his word, spend time in prayer is an opportunity for change, to let go of something holding us down, or grow into something new. Jesus said, '..for the one who has, more will be given!'

And it happens when we learn to actively put our trust our Father's discipline,
that his motive is love - not constant criticism but constant help
and his character is kind - gently bringing us closer to who He imagined us to be.

So I wonder how you might strengthen your faith?

I wonder if there is something you have forgotten about God that might help you today...?

I wonder if you have the trust to ask for help.

Prayer of St Richard

Thanks be to thee, my Lord Jesus Christ,
for all the benefits thou hast given me,
for all the pains and insults thou hast borne for me.
O most merciful redeemer, friend and brother,
may I know thee more clearly,
love thee more dearly,
and follow thee more nearly, day by day.

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Amen.

Further reading: Hosea 11:7-9 - Does God ever give up on his people?

Tomorrow's Reading: Heb 12:18-24