

Devotional Blog

Sunday 29th March 2020

As most of you know I have a passing interest in sports, football especially. Which is just as well given that I am chaplain to our local football team. Like the rest of society all sport has come to a grinding halt. The sports channels are almost redundant!!

But in times of crisis you can always rely on the good old BBC to come up trumps. Last weekend should have been the quarter finals of this season's FA Cup and the games would have been shared between BT Sports and BBC.

The Beeb dug into its archives and screened re-runs of quarter final matches from previous seasons. Now the games I watched I could remember very little about, so it was good to refresh my memory. There were things that I noticed that I am sure I would not have picked up when watching it first time.

Therefore, I want to remind us of a passage and a theme that has been mentioned before at Hampton.

Romans 15:5&6

"May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you a spirit of unity among yourselves as you follow Christ Jesus, so that with one heart and mouth you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ."

This passage became the motto text for the folks from Hampton Baptist as we looked to find God's path for our future. Three words stood out nearly three years ago and I think they are very relevant for the situation we find ourselves in today. They are endurance, encouragement and unity.

Endurance

Normally, at this time of year, the sporting calendar is gearing up for endurance events. The Boat Race, The Grand National and The London Marathon. All three are designed to test the endurance of all competitors. A great deal of determination is needed to complete the course. I guess we have all seen the exhaustion of the rowers when have just finished the 4 ½ mile course. Horses and riders exhibit the same at the end of their race and as for the marathon runners, some of whom have completed the 26 miles in some energy sapping costumes, their achievement is truly amazing.

Paul is writing to the church in Rome to instruct them to stick with following Jesus. We are going to need the same endurance individually and corporately as we seek to follow Christ in these difficult days. **Hebrews 12:1 instructs us to “Run with perseverance the race marked out before us”**

Encouragement

The competitors in the events that I have just mentioned not only require endurance to complete the race, but encouragement is also much needed, especially when the going gets tough. The crews in the boat race have their coxes, the horses have their jockeys and runners have the thousands of spectators who line the course cheering them on. Knowing that the finish line is getting closer the further along the course they go is a great incentive to keep going. For us, in our present circumstances, we are encouraged to follow the government’s instruction and the incentive for doing so is to regain our freedom!!

Paul encouraged the church in Philippi to “press on towards the goal to win the prize” (Phil 3:14). And what a prize it is!! Those who reach the goal of faithfully following Jesus Christ until the end of their days will win the prize of eternal life, so it’s certainly worth keeping going!!

Unity

Crews in the boat race must keep going together, they are united in their efforts to finish the course. Jockey and horse need to remain together if they are to negotiate all the fences. If the jockey is unseated then the race is over for the pair of them. In the marathon, there is a unity among those who take part as they encourage each other that they can reach the finish. For this country to get through the current crisis we need to be united in our efforts to stay safe, by staying at home as much as we possibly can. When we are out we observe the social distancing protocol. United, the virus will be defeated.

The church of Jesus Christ needs to be united against the enemy, Satan. We can be guilty of shooting our own soldiers, with gossip and unkind words or actions. We must guard ourselves against such behaviour and remind ourselves of who we really are.

Look at the words of the 3rd verse of the old hymn "Onward Christian Soldiers"

Like a mighty army, moves the church of God

Brothers, we are treading where the saints have trod;

We are not divided, all one body we-

One in faith and spirit, one eternally.

As we face up to the uncertainty that the coronavirus has brought us, let us be prepared to endure and encourage each other in a spirit of unity, as we stand **"Shoulder to shoulder, living, loving and serving God."**

Paul Barker

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