

A Few Thoughts for the Hunkered Down

Thursday, December 17, 2020

A Second Half Team

Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold, but he who stands firm to the end will be saved. —Matthew 24:12-13 (see also 10:22)

Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil. —Ephesians 5:15-16

One of the supreme compliments which can be paid to a sports team is to call them “A Second Half Team.” This is a team that knows how to play the whole game, strong to the very end, and with that perseverance comes victory. A good second half team may or may not be leading by halftime, but the score at that point in the contest means little. Some of these kinds of winners seem to make a habit of lagging behind until the very end when a last-minute field goal, touchdown, or combination thereof puts them into the winner’s column. I don’t know how this COVID game has been going for all of you, but I do know that this contest has been a long one and that some are really hurting. However, you feel that you are faring, I do invite you to pause for a halftime pep talk, and consider how we can be a second half team.

A halftime talk can make all the difference in the game, for it gives us a needed rest, an opportunity to evaluate, and a chance to adjust our strategy. This game has certainly run long, and back in February few would have dreamed that we would still be in the thick of it these many months later. When I speak of pausing for a halftime talk, I do not mean that I anticipate struggling for another ten months, but then again, only God knows. It does appear that the end is in sight with the vaccine in production and rumors of distribution in a matter of days, but this game isn’t over yet, and so we strategize.

A halftime talk usually begins with how the game has progressed thus far. It is a time to ask very basic questions, like, “What’s going on?” What’s going on is a dangerous virus which has done real damage and caused us all to have to isolate and separate from others. Humans were not created for isolation and separation, so this has caused deep stress and harm to our very souls. Our struggle has been to stay connected in meaningful ways despite all the prohibitions and concerns over virus transmission. We are now all experts on Zoom, whether we like it or not.

Some seem to have done well at this staying connected game, while others are not so flexible or digitally able. The real “people-persons” among us are feeling it most deeply, but all are under the stress of isolation. I hear many reports that this crisis is not bringing out the best in us, and there are some moments of my own that I wish

I could undo. Worse yet, we fall into the trap of feeling guilty about feeling bad, and this is a dangerous downward spiral. But second half teams know how to break that spiral. We stand by the truth that there is still plenty of time left for winning. God delights to see us leave the unpleasant past at the foot of the cross and well behind us, and will gladly coach us through that one!

One could say that the virus is wearing us down. Any prolonged struggle will do that, and again we are facing in the wrong direction if we become depressed or feel like failures because of this fatigue. We continue on with what strength we do have, and are sweetly surprised along the way to experience God's power boosts so graciously given. As our energy may not seem boundless, we take some care to strategize that our emotional and spiritual resources might be used most effectively. What has worked best for you these days in keeping life rich and meaningful? How have you been able to bless others? What is God telling you in these days? This is also a time to identify our enemies (no, not your annoying neighbor) such as depression, anger, lethargy or worry. These stresses love to gang up on us, and as a group they are hard to defeat. Pick out the one specific stress which is now doing the most damage and talk to Jesus about a counter-strategy. Strategize!

Finally, let us watch the clock. This is a tricky matter. Know that the days of the virus are numbered, but don't look at the clock, absolutely convinced that the crisis will all end on a certain week or month. That is a set-up for heartbreak. Do celebrate the good reports, pray for an end to it all, and then let those glad reports give you energy. Let us keep the pace as we near the finish line. We often talk of the value of getting off to a good start, but the real victory comes with the strong finish! I've never been much of an athlete, but I do know that in running a race one wants very much to run *through* the finish line, and not merely stumble to it.

Take heart. The game is long and wearying, but the opponent is wearing out, and we are a second half team!

Blessings,

Pastor Jim

O God, who hast promised that they who endure to the end shall be saved, gives us grace to persevere in thy holy service all our days, that we may reach the end of our faith, even the salvation of our souls; though Jesus Christ our Lord. —The Narrow Way