

Words for an Emerging Church

Wednesday, July 28, 2021

An Olympic Prediction (Although I Hope That I Am Wrong)

Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. —Hebrews 12:1

The Olympic Games are now upon us, and with this event I offer a prediction. It is a bitter-sweet event as we are gladdened that the games can finally begin after COVID threatened their very existence, but sadly they shall be held this year with no spectators. This time around the memories of packed stands cheering on the world's best to new records will only be a memory. It is certain that there will be no crowds, and I fear (and this is my prediction) that there will be very few new world's records.

As a child I was fascinated by all the world's records which were broken at the Olympics. Why did they happen all at that place? Certain events seemed to *guarantee* new records being set. Why? It seemed to me that a best performance could be made at any time and place. Why did these things only happen at such competitions? It took a while, but I learned the power of the *crowd* and *competition*. This year there will be competition, but no crowds. I truly hope that I am wrong on this forecast, and do not mean in any way to denigrate these finest athletes, but they shall be missing out on a significant advantage which previous competitions offered.

Never underestimate the power of the gathered crowd. This is why Jesus has called us, not to be individually enlightened persons, but to be a unified Church. We are to be God's gathered crowd, encouraging and cheering on one another. The writer of Hebrews explains well the importance of our being this supportive family. *And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.* (Hebrews 10:24-2)

These athletes will see and hear no cheering crowds, at least with their physical eyes and ears, but they may still have a crowd experience with the eyes and ears of their imaginations. Does this sound strange? It shouldn't. Each of these competitors will enter the games knowing that there are countless family members, friends, and even a whole nation cheering for them from places not visible from the arena. Their imaginations are not making up fiction but are seeing with eyes of faith a reality that is beyond their physical reach. In living rooms across their respective home countries there will be enthusiastic fans actually clapping and shouting for them! The challenge

for the athlete will be to make that faith connection with that unseen crowd. With the right kind of faith, a basket full of new world records may actually be produced at this year's games.

No matter how athletic or un-athletic we may be, we can all relate to the athlete's struggle to play by the rules and compete with all their heart and soul, and we can all appreciate the value of a supportive audience. This is all a picture of our lives. As believers we can readily grasp the teaching of Hebrews as we are told of the unseen audience which cheers us on in our life's struggles and races. The scripture is referring to the many believers who have run life's race before us and have gone on to be with the Lord. They watch us as we strive and struggle, and they root for us. They understand, for they have been in our shoes. We are not alone! May God increase in us a Tokyo athlete's kind of faith that with the eyes and ears of our godly imaginations we may see and hear this supportive crowd.

Enjoy the Olympics and be inspired by these amazing athletes, and may the empty stands remind us of the wonderful gallery of saints which dwell beyond the arena and beyond the reach of our eyes and ears. Let us be grateful for the crowds who cheer us on through this life (and let us as well be good cheerleaders for others). Let us also remember the saints who root for us from heavenly bleachers. We cannot see them, but most certainly they are there. And who knows? They may even inspire us to set some new records!

Blessings,

Pastor Jim

May the Lord Jesus put his hands on our eyes also, for then we too shall begin to look not at what is seen but at what is not seen. May he open the eyes that are concerned not with the present but with what is yet to come, may he unseal the heart's vision, that we may gaze on God in the Spirit, through the same Lord, Jesus Christ, whose glory and power will endure throughout the unending succession of ages. —Origen, 185-254