



Epiphany 4

A Short Reflective Service of Prayer for those at home

As the darkness of winter passes and the Spring breaks forth,
the light of your love breaks upon our world,
comes to us in the mountains of our lives,
shines into the valley of our being,
warms and lights our souls.

We praise you Jesus Christ, Light of this world.

Blessed be the name of the Lord. AMEN

A Sentence from the Old Testament

‘You shall eat the fruit of your labours’ *Psalms 128*

A Reading from the New Testament

I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection.
Not that I have already obtained all this or have already been made perfect,
But I press on to take hold of that for which Christ took hold of me.
I do all of this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings.

Do you not know that in a race all the runners run,
but only one gets the prize?

Run in such a way as to get the prize.

Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training.

They do it to get the crown that does not last for ever.

Therefore I do not run like a man aimlessly;
but one thing I do, forgetting what is behind and straining to what is ahead,
I press on towards the goal to win the prize for which
God has called me heavenwards in Christ Jesus.

Philippians 3 & 1 Corinthians 9. (selected verses)

Light your own Candle

(please ensure this is done safely)

Pause for a moment of quiet

Thought for the Day

‘The one thing I do is to press on to win the prize for which God has called me heavenwards in Christ Jesus.’

St Paul draws to our attention in two of his letters that the Christian journey can in some aspects be likened to a running race. Of course this is no ordinary affair for it has no limit on the number of entrants, in fact it is open to everyone, no-one is barred from taking part, all are welcome.

Now for those who are physically challenged and find the mere thought of running in a race repellent these images may be hard to contemplate but don't give up just yet, read on!

When I think of a running race that involves large numbers, the images conjured up in my mind are akin to the London marathon. At this annual event we witness a seething mass of bodies surging through the streets, all pressing on towards the finishing line.

For just a few it will be about winning, for others, perhaps beating a 'personal' best when running in a marathon, and then there are those who do not focus on how long it takes, just taking part and finishing is their personal goal. The 'victory' will be different for each person and yet they will all share something in common, the need to get fit and practice so that they 'go the distance.'

I once had a secretary who was in training for the London marathon and without doubt she was focussed. Every evening, every weekend she would be pounding the pavements, building up her stamina and muscles to the point where she felt able to run in what is for many an endurance race, a battle not just of the muscles but of the mind.

During this past year, many of us have likened living through COVID as something of a marathon, a challenge that has stretched the imaginations of many to come up with ways to keep our bodies and our minds fit. What has been amazing are people like 'Captain Tom' now Colonel Sir Tom Moore. He became a household name as he set himself the task of walking 100 laps of his garden before his 100th birthday. The prize he sought had been to raise £1000 for the NHS. The sight of this elderly man setting himself such a mental and physical challenge touched the hearts of many around the world, incredibly his 'goal'... his reward for achieving such a feat no one could have imagined, he raised over 32 million pounds!

How then do we understand Paul's message? I think Paul sees the importance of keeping ourselves fit in this mortal life, not just physically or mentally (important as these both are) but also spiritually. Sir Tom Moore showed how with a teaspoonful of hope and a bucketful of motivation he was able to achieve such great things.

When I think about both my secretary pounding the pavements or Sir Tom struggling with his walking aid there must be hope for us all. As Christians, the journey of faith is indeed like a marathon.

Becoming a Christian is not all over in a moment. Coming to faith is just the beginning, a striving towards the prize that is not received in this life but in the next as we take our place in heaven.

The world constantly challenges our faith to believe in Jesus and to keep going knowing that we never will achieve perfection in this life. When we 'sign up' and become a disciple of Christ, a Christian, we cannot simply say we believe and leave the rest up to God; far from it, we must take faith seriously, read the Bible, worship and pray every day.

It is important to remember this is not a 'race' like any other, how fast we go matters not! Some of us may have heard of Eliud Kipchoge who is the fastest marathon runner in the world (under two hours!) but I reckon more people in the world will remember Capt. Sir Tom Moore and how he never gave up!

At the heart of Paul's letters is the encouragement we all need to hear as we take part in the 'marathon' that is the Christian journey, the race for 'life.' Remember, no matter how hard it gets, say to yourself, over and over if needed, *'The one thing I CAN do is to press on to win the prize for which God has called me heavenwards in Christ Jesus.'*

Pause for a moment of quiet

O God, we bless you for the infinite beauty of created things -
the sand, wind, wave and all that makes our world habitable.

We bless you for the endurance of hope
for the promise of renewal,
for the knowledge that one day you will call us home
to rest from the marathon that is life.

May your joy and hope be always in our hearts
as we press on, focusing on the prize you hold before us.
Strengthen our faith and empower us, God of our growing
and bring us safely home.

A Call to Prayer

Let us pray for the world, the Church and each other

Prayers for the World

Who will we pray for today? Let us name them.

(Silently name those we pray for or the issues in the world that concern us today)

O Lord, hear our prayer.

Have mercy on your people O God
In this new and challenging world that stands before us.

Bring healing and wholeness to people and nations,
and have pity on those suffering in their isolation.

Strengthen all who are fearful of disease and death,
bring them to a new hope in Christ.

Hear the cry of those who lament the passing of loved ones,
grant them your peace and surround them with your presence.

Give rest to the departed
and bring them, with your saints, to glory everlasting.

We commend the world to you for which Christ died,
lead us in the pathways of truth and grant us your wisdom O God,
now and forever more, AMEN.

The Lord's Prayer

Our Father, who art in heaven
Hallowed be thy name
Thy kingdom come; Thy will be done;
On earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our trespasses,
As we forgive those who trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation;
But Deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory,
For ever and ever. AMEN



Closing Prayer

In the words of St Augustine:
O Lord, grant that I may desire Thee,
and desiring Thee, seek Thee,
and seeking Thee, find Thee,
and finding Thee, be satisfied with Thee forever.
AMEN