

St Nicholas Parish Church, Prestwick

The Thought for the Week

Sunday 20<sup>th</sup> February 2022

Amongst the many cards and letters which arrived these past weeks of incapacity and recuperation, expressing good wishes, and the hope that I will soon be back on my feet again, several of my correspondents wrote that they were looking forward to that day when they might see me jogging along Prestwick Prom! In their dreams!

O yes, I have read all the blurb of the fitness gurus who hammer on with their anti-obesity message and provide us with useful charts which demonstrate how many calories there are per food portion, and what duration of jogging or running is necessary to get rid of them. Thus, to remove the effects of one fried egg, I have to jog for twenty minutes! For one pancake, it is a run of seven minutes.

The first time I see a jogger smiling, I will take it up at once.

You see them, often well honed, lean and body perfect, in their brightly coloured lycra, coming out first thing in the morning, or at dusk, blundering along the country's pavements and knocking pedestrians into the gutter.

Never has there been a more ridiculous fad.

It is only in the past forty or so years, (a misguided and idiotic assembly of years if ever I saw one, and dangerous and disastrous to boot,) that our country has gone in, and in a really serious way, for panting, meticulously counting the number of carbohydrates.

I have to confess, though, that I did jog twice! When I was Minister at Girvan North Parish Church, one of my neighbours, Eric, who was an Elder in the Congregation and who was my dentist, invited me to join him in his daily evening jog. What possessed me to agree, I shall never know, but it only lasted two nights – down The Avenue from the Manse, across the Bank Burn, up North Park Avenue, along Queen's Drive, then home!

My next door neighbour, Dr Jamie Strachan, my GP, saw me returning, and he remarked to me over the garden wall, "Fraser, if you insist on exercising, don't run or jog. You will do your knees untold harm. Take up cycling or swimming instead!"

A friend of mine who lives in central Glasgow and likes to be very active, took up jogging and was pounding along at eventide in the Merchant City near his flat, when he suddenly caught sight of himself reflected in Marks and Spencer shop window and was so unnerved by the appalling and outlandish spectacle that he took a taxi home and hung up his shorts straightaway.

And do you remember the fine example of Lady Antonia Fraser who announced that she had abandoned jogging on the shaming day when she found her children walking past her?

Two summers ago, just as the Pandemic took hold, I purchased a very expensive electric bike, fell off twice on Adamton Road, bringing the traffic to a standstill on one occasion, and, without demur, sold it the following week – at a considerable loss! What was I thinking about?

I must learn to swim!

Of course, exercise is important for our physical, mental and emotional wellbeing, but in moderation, for goodness sake!

A few years ago, a colleague in the Presbytery persuaded me to take an Offpeak Membership at Bannatyne's Gym in Ayr. We would go a few times a week at lunchtime and there was I, pounding away on the treadmill and coming to grips with all the apparatus for cardiac fitness, all the while, folk recognising me and coming up to hold a conversation while I tried to concentrate on what I was doing! It got so impossible that I thought to myself, "Why should I be spending £30 a month to chat to folk, when I can do it for free on the Sandgate?" So, yet again, I gave up.

I had grown weary.

I am definitely not a jogger, a runner or an athlete of any description!

In the Old Testament Scriptures, in the Book of Isaiah, we read in Chapter 40, "...those that wait for the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they shall march on and never grow faint"!

Haven't we all been feeling weary and drained of hope and energy this past while?

"Weary" seems like the word of the day these days.

For almost two years we have been unable to come to Church as normal, and we have had to deal with hand sanitisers and masks and social distancing; our travel and holiday plans were thwarted again and again; we have not been able to visit relatives and friends in hospitals and care homes; our young folk were taught online, distanced from their teachers and their peer groups; our wonderful doctors and nurses and health care workers were exhausted from the tsunami of illness with which they had to deal.

At the same time, we have been tired of hearing of all the pathetic goings on in Downing Street and Whitehall; tired of the lies; tired of those whom we have elected to serve us, trying to defend the indefensible.

So, what happens when, as Christians, we are feeling the journey very tiring, when our breath is spent and our legs are as heavy as lead and the road seems endless?

Well, Isaiah has the answer – "Those who wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength", he writes.

None of us are spared tough times, but we have the promise of God that He will see us through them if we wait upon Him; if we make time to hear Him in the cacophony of voices all around us; if we take time apart to worship Him, to seek His benediction upon our living; to renew our strength by the power of His wonderful Holy Spirit, the One who gives us wings to "mount up with wings like eagles."

Just after my accident in December, after my operation, as I was lying in my hospital bed in the Orthopaedic Trauma Ward in Glasgow Royal Infirmary, I thought of this verse on more than one occasion. I knew that it was not a sprint that lay ahead of me, but a marathon – the long road to healing and strength.

Yes, at times, that road has been very tiring indeed, but thanks to those who have been running at my side, and thanks to the God who has promised the fullness of His grace in Jesus Christ, the winning post is almost in sight! You lean on Him each step of the way!

And do you know what? You can enjoy a Kit Kat and a pot of tea any time you feel you want to stop to draw breath!

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