

A reflection for Wednesday in Holy Week, April 2020
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Hebrews 12:1-3

"The Preacher knows that it is late in the day, and that we have already run several sprints and dashes. We are winded and tired, but this is the race that counts, so we are to strip off anything that would slow us down – all the weighty encumbrances and shackling sins (12.1) – and run our portion of the race with endurance."

Long, Thomas G. *Hebrews*.
Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching
John Knox Press: Louisville, KY, 1997, p.128

Renowned preacher and professor of preaching describes the author of the book of Hebrews as "The Preacher", as the book resembles less a letter and more a sermon. And in his interpretation of the work, he shows how the Preacher in Hebrews uses all kinds of techniques to spur on his congregation that was growing weary.

It is Wednesday in Holy Week. The Gospel reading for today (John 13.12-32) describes the scene at the dinner table when Jesus, mere hours before his arrest, gives Judas, his betrayer, a piece of bread. Drama is in the air. The climax of Holy Week is drawing close. It's been a long Lent and we are eager for Easter.

Moreso this year than in Lents and Holy Weeks gone by, I think it is fair to say that we are a church and a world that has grown weary. The pandemic that has travelled the globe in the space of a few months has worn us down in ways we could never have thought possible. We are tired of staying home; tired of isolation; tired of not being with family and friends other than through virtual media. We are weary of worrying, weary of uncertainty; weary of wondering when things will get back to "normal". Whatever normal means.

And so, the Preacher's words in Hebrews is a rallying call for us anew. Heard every year, this day in Holy Week, its charge rings in our ears as a coach's call to the athlete entering the last leg of the race.

"Since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses," the epic speech begins. Since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses. We, as the church, are surrounded by the saints who have gone before, and saints still here on the ground. Members of our congregations who are volunteering, praying, working in essential services, or just staying home for the safety and health of everyone; and all others who are doing the same thing but aren't members of our congregations. All of them saints who are running this pandemic race with us which has turned from the 100m dash into a marathon. As the phrase has appeared often on signs and in public service announcements: "We are in this together".

But we who follow Jesus have another incentive, another hope. We can look to Jesus as the pioneer and perfecter of our faith. He took on the cross, and all that it meant, and transformed it into a symbol of new life. He is the one that enables us to run the race to begin with.

As this Holy Week inexorably runs to its climax, let us look to Jesus – the Jesus who fed his betrayer, the Jesus who forgave his accusers, the Jesus who has been around from the very beginning – let us look to Jesus, and keep our eyes on the hope and the promise he gives us. Resurrection, in all its forms, awaits.