

EYES ON THE PRIZE (Lindfield 18th August 2019)

HEBREWS 11:29 – 12:2

Do you have heroes? I don't mean your favourite actor or sportsperson. I don't even mean someone you admire but someone whose character and actions provide inspiration over a long period of time. Someone whose life you would like to emulate. There are immediate heroes – those who do a heroic thing on the spur of the moment: like those who captured the man with the knife in the city this week or someone who rescues someone from a burning house. I have two heroes – both clergymen. There's Martin Luther King Jr who rose from a Parish Minister to the leader of the Civil Rights Movement in the US in the 1960s and whose actions cost him his life. His influence will be felt for the entire history of that country. My other hero is Rev. John Flynn. He was a Presbyterian Minister in the early years of the 20thC. He had a profound concern for the people of the outback. As a Patrol Padre he encountered the loneliness and isolation of people on remote Cattle Stations in SA and the NT. He also realised that many were dying needlessly because they couldn't get medical help in time.

His first idea was to establish a series of Nursing Stations with specially trained nurses in charge that would provide basic treatment until a doctor could come. These Bush Nursing Stations were still in operation until the 1970s. But then that wasn't enough. It often took days for a doctor to arrive. He envisioned that if the patient couldn't get to the doctor, the doctor would need to get to the patient. A flying doctor was the only answer. Then there was the problem of contacting the doctor over such vast distances. Radio communications were available but unreliable so he set about developing a better wireless communication system so the Pedal Radio was invented. For a while Flynn became the world's most expert exponent of this technology. It revolutionised communication in the outback. The Flying Doctor Service was born.

The writer to the Hebrews tells his readers that there were a great many heroes of the faith who did great things to live out their devotion to God. Many of them, we are told, did not see the fulfilment of God's promise to them before they died but they lived by faith in the expectation and surety that God's promises would come to be. In honour of that the writer uses the metaphor of the sporting arena where all these great men and women of faith, who have died not receiving the promise, are in the stands shouting support and encouragement, urging us on as we strive towards our goal, having known Christ, the promised Messiah who they never knew, our goal of knowing him and so knowing God through him. Having a relationship with God at a level they could never imagine. They are urging us on to do everything we can to make our race winnable.

What do they suggest we do to make it easier to run our race?

1. ***Let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles.***
We don't want to be weighed down by anything that is too heavy or unnecessary. Runners, swimmers, athletes spend lots of money perfecting clothing that is light to wear and that will streamline air and water so they will not be a hindrance. You never see a runner with an untied shoelace because that would cause him/her injury and would surely cause them to lose the race. They need to be free to compete at their very best. So too in our spiritual race. We don't want to be weighed down by outmoded traditions or customs that have no relevance to

today. We don't want to cling on to doctrine that is of no relevance or use any more. "But we've always done it this way" are 7 words that can kill a church. Five other words that will do the same: "we've never done that before". John Flynn thought his Bush Nursing Stations would solve the problem he saw but while they were a good idea and he continued them, they didn't solve his problem so he looked for new solutions. He didn't say, "That will have to do" or just give up because it was too hard he just kept running his race until he reached the finish line.

2. ***Let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus.***

This is no 100m sprint that's over in 10 secs. This is a marathon that takes our whole life to complete. Just as the marathon runner runs and runs and runs until he thinks he can't run any more he finally gets a glimpse of the stadium and the finish and that urges him on. As he gets closer he begins to hear the cheers of the crowd and once he enters the roar becomes deafening and that urges him on for that final lap and then it's over. ***Consider him...so that we will not grow weary and lose heart.*** We consider Jesus because of what he endured, how he ran the race set before him, which was for us. We get weary. We have doubts and questions. We don't understand everything we'd like to. We see others who appear to have no relationship with God at all and who don't appear to want one – succeed in life and do very well while we struggle. It doesn't seem fair. We see that bad things happen to good people. They are some of the things that we have not thrown off and we let them entangle us by our not fixing our eyes on Jesus but rather looking around at our own level and comparing our race to others rather than concentrating on the finish line and the prize. When we seek to run the race Jesus maps out for us we don't have time to look around at what others are doing but our time, energy, resources, imagination, determination should all be focussed on the finish line and the cheers of that great cloud of witnesses that surround us and are urging us on.

They didn't receive what was promised but they are glad we have and they are glad we are completing what they started. We owe much to them. They are our heroes in the faith.

Who are your heroes? How do they measure up? We admire them and try to emulate them. Our greatest hero is the greatest man who ever lived. Our greatest hero is the one sent by God to show how to truly live the life we have been given. The writer to the Hebrews reminds us that we should ***fix our eyes on Jesus....For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured such opposition from sinners, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.***

Martin Luther King Jr and Rev. Dr John Flynn remain my heroes but even they do not measure up to the greatest hero of them all – Jesus of Nazareth, the Christ of God.

AMEN.