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Briefing 69: Wednesday 23rd June, 2021.

Dear Friends,

Firstly, let me begin with a huge thank you for the generous gift we received at St Nicholas on Sunday. We have now started that difficult job of deciding which barbecue to buy – but we hope it will be here and in use for the church family barbecues next month.

The weapons and armour of the Christian – the Gospel of Peace.

Last week I wrote about the need for us to put on the **breastplate of righteousness** (Galatians 6:14b), that is to such live holy lives that we do not succumb to temptation and sin, and so that our lives reflect the goodness of God to a watching world. That latter theme is picked up in this next piece of armour: *“stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace.”*

Having the right footwear is key. It would be madness to start an Olympic sprint final without running spikes and idiotic to start a long-distance walk in anything but stout walking shoes. And should you ever attempt climbing an ice-covered mountain, you will need crampons. The sharp spikes dig into the ice, stop you from slipping, and allow you to move forward. Both of those ideas are found in this phrase. If we are a disciple of Jesus, we need to stand our ground and push forward.

According to Paul, this readiness to stand firm and move forward is related to the gospel of peace. The gospel of peace is the gospel message that through repentance and faith in the finished work of Jesus, we are now reconciled with God. We who were once God’s enemies, have now been forgiven, redeemed and adopted into God’s family. We now have Jesus as our brother, his Spirit as our Spirit, and his Father as our Heavenly Father. Holding onto those glorious truths makes such a difference, because they remind us of who we are, how much we are worth, and where our future lies. No matter what our circumstances, no matter what the world, our closest friends or families think of us, knowing that we have peace with God through Jesus gives us a firm foundation for life, whatever it brings. Do you truly know that certainty yourself?

But these shoes are not just for standing firm, they are for pushing forward, advancing on the enemy, seeking to gain ground and gain hearers for this glorious gospel message. In Isaiah 52 verse 7, God’s Messenger (Jesus!), arrives proclaiming peace, good tidings and salvation. His feet are described as *beautiful* because they bring such good news. Those who hear it are told to burst into songs of joy because *“the Lord has comforted his people... And all the ends of the earth will see the salvation of our God.”* Why is it such good news? Because this offer of peace between God and man is available for everyone, everywhere. There is no age limit, no bar on gender, no requirement for a certain level of income or qualifications. Character references, even clean criminal record checks are utterly irrelevant, because on the cross Jesus paid the price for our sin and made a way that even the guiltiest sinner can be washed clean. That’s the gospel message of peace that we are to be ready to take out and speak out, whenever we have the opportunity.

But the peace of the gospel is not simply vertical, between people and God. It is also horizontal, making peace possible between people who would otherwise be divided. Earlier in the book of Ephesians, Paul spent a lot of time explaining that through Jesus, the almost impenetrable barrier between Jew and Gentile has been demolished. “For He himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the dividing wall of hostility.” Ephesians 2:14. Here is the hope of a true, united community. Here is the means by which racism and nationalism can be overcome and people brought together.

For all its failures, and there have been many, the worldwide church of Jesus Christ stands as a glorious model of unity between people of different ages, backgrounds, nationalities, languages, and cultures. Our own churches show this well, as they should, but we cannot rest on our laurels. To a world divided over politics and race, confused over gender, and split over so many issues, the unity we have through Jesus Christ offers real hope and a place to belong for everyone. Our task, following Jesus and wearing the same kind of shoes, is to take this good news out so that many others might come in.

So, what kind of spiritual footwear are you wearing today? Make sure it is the glorious gospel of peace!

Grace and peace...

Dave

IMPORTANT STUFF – DON'T JUST GLANCE- TAKE IT ALL IN!

Come + pray!

Friday night at St Nicks from 8pm-10pm.

Come + join us and pray for God's Holy Spirit to move in us and across this town that we might know more of God's love and power in our lives and see many brought to Jesus.

Private Prayer in St Nicholas church THIS WEEK and NEXT WEEK.

Tuesday from 2pm-4pm, Wednesday 12noon-2pm and Thursday 10am – 12 noon.

Tuesday morning from 7am-8am on Zoom. Contact Dave for a link.

An Invitation to Grow a Good and Beautiful Christian Life

A 30-session course designed to help you grow in knowledge, understanding and practice as a follower of Jesus. Starting end of June 2021 and running on alternate Wednesday nights (7:30pm-9:30pm), each week will include direct teaching, discussion, prayer, with follow-up exercises and further reading to do before each session.

The course will have 5 elements:

Bible Teaching. Christian Doctrine. Practical Discipleship. Prayer. Encouragement.

Speak to Dave for more details or to register your interest.

Developing
your Christian

Discipleship

There's still just enough time to sign up for the **Discipleship course** which starts on Wednesday night at 7:30pm. 20 people have now signed up, but there is space for more. It runs on Home Group weeks- so if you are in a home group, I'd *suggest* you do this instead, so life doesn't get too busy with the extra reading and homework!

If you'd like to join in, whether in person or via Zoom, please let me know by ASAP. Please don't let the length of the course put you off. Learning more about God and his ways is always worth it!



MORNING COFFEE OR AFTERNOON TEA IN THE VICARAGE: After the cancellation this week, the Vicarage Garden Café will be open for bookings on, **Friday 2nd July (3pm-4:30pm)** and **Wednesday 14th July (10:30am-noon)**. We can take up to 30 people each time, sat at tables of 6 around the garden. If you'd like to join us, please contact Judy on enquiries@saintnicholaschurch.org.uk

Deanery Synod Special Event: "The Seeming Absurdity of Black Lives Matter." **Everyone** is invited to this event at St Andrew and St George, Stevenage on Wednesday 7 July, (7.00pm for a prompt 7.30pm start), where the speaker will be **Anthony Reddie**. Anthony is the Editor of the Black Theology International Journal, a fellow of Wesley House, Cambridge and was recently appointed as the Director for the Oxford Centre for Religion and Culture within Oxford University, where he is also a fellow of Regent's Park College, Oxford. In 2020 he was awarded the Lanfranc Award for Education and Scholarship by the Archbishop of Canterbury for his exceptional and sustained contribution to Black Theology in Britain and beyond. Anthony will speak for about an hour and then there'll be time for discussion/questions. **Booking** will open in the next few days- do watch out for the link.

Readings for the next few weeks: This week we start a new series in Genesis, and for those who'd like to read the passages before coming to church on Sundays, the readings for the next 3 weeks are as follows:

27th June: Genesis 4: 1-16

4th July: Genesis 4: 17-24

11th July: Genesis 4:25-5:32

Church Family BBQs - Sunday 11th July from 12:30pm, Saturday 24th July from 4pm. Booking forms will be in church this weekend but you can also email us to say you are coming. We're asking every family group to bring either some soft drink, a salad of some description, or a pudding to serve 6-8. We hope everyone will be able to come to ONE of the TWO dates!

2 ways to serve and strengthen our fellowship:

REFRESHMENTS: St Nicholas is still **VERY** short of people to serve refreshments after our services. If you can help in this way (and it is so easy, no one would find it too difficult!) please speak to Mike or Karen as soon as possible.

LEADING A WALKING GROUP: Both churches are situated on the edge of beautiful countryside, and walking is a great way to get exercise and to meet and encourage one another. Would 1 or 2 people like to organise a short weekly or fortnightly walk? Do let Dave know.