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**Briefing 100: Wednesday 2<sup>nd</sup> February, 2022.**

Dear friends,

During my early teenage years, we moved to the north coast of Scotland and for a while lived in house from which, with a little neck-stretching, you could see the sea from every single window. One view was of Dunnet Bay; a 3-mile sandy beach overlooking the most northerly point of the British Isles. It was a beautiful place to grow up. I've returned a few times as an adult, and a great joy is walking these remote beaches where there is not a single footprint of any other person in sight.

Sometimes the Christian life can feel a little like that; as if the path you are treading is one that no one has trod before. The thing is, that simply isn't true. Oh, the particular circumstances may be unique – after all there is only one you and only one of all those other people that are walking through life with you - but the kind of circumstances you are facing, the problems, the difficulties, the obstacles, the battles, none of those are unique to you. Our lives are not pristine beaches of virgin sand where no one has walked before. Our lives follow well-worn pathways that the saints of old have walked on before. And that should give us huge comfort. For if they were able to make it through, to overcome, to endure, then so can we.

The writer of the book of Hebrews puts it like this in chapter 12 verse 1:

*“Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us.”*

A great cloud of witnesses. Those witnesses are believers from across the ages and around the globe who have followed Jesus. In chapter 11 the writer of Hebrews lists some of them. None of them lived in a perfect world. None of them had perfect families. None of them were always in good health. And none of them saw, in their lifetime, the thing they truly hoped for. All of them endured hardship and suffering for their faith, with many of them losing their very lives. Yet they all persevered to the end, confident that God had planned something far better for them.

And of course, they are not alone. Most of the names in Hebrews chapter 11 may be of famous believers, who have endured extraordinary things, but there are billions more ordinary, unremarkable, unknown Christians who have also walked the path of Christian discipleship. They too have proved faithful as they've continued to follow Jesus despite grief, sadness, disappointments, loneliness, slander, unkindness, divorce, redundancy, poverty, prison or being passed over for promotion again and again. Whatever difficulties you are facing right now, whatever problems make following Jesus hard, you're not the first Christian to face it. And like the believers who have gone before, you too can make it through.

I hope you find that encouraging. I know I do. If we imagine that we are blazing a new trail, boldly going where no one has gone before, we may doubt that it is possible to make it through, just as people once doubted that anyone could run the mile in under 4 minutes, or one hundred metres in under 10 seconds. Yet since those barriers were broken, many more people have done it too, because the first person to do it showed that it could be done. The great cloud of witnesses shows you that following Jesus to the end of your life is possible. They have done it. So can you.

Of course, like them we need to follow the same path and do the same kind of things. They threw off everything that hindered them, and they battled with the sin that sought to tie them up and put them out of the race. And they also had to keep running with perseverance the path that was there for them. They managed it. So can we. So can I. So can you.

So think back over your Christian life to those you admire, those who have been faithful witnesses, lifelong disciples, people in whom you could see that Christ dwelt. I can think of a few, I'm sure you can as well. What's more, there are plenty of them in our churches! And if you are finding the Christian faith difficult right now, why not ask if you can sit down with them and learn from them. Ask them how they have kept going. Ask them what continues to inspire them. Ask them to pray for you, that with them you might continue to run with perseverance the race that God has given you to run.

May God bless you this week,

*Dave*

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

**EVENTS THIS SPRING...** Along with Grace Community Church and Longmeadow Evangelical Church, we would like to invite you to come along, with your friends, to 3 special events this spring. More details and printed invitations will be available soon, but do get these dates in your diary now and be thinking and praying about who you can invite.

**Quiz + Pudding Night:** Saturday 12<sup>th</sup> March – 7:45pm at Longmeadow Church, Oaks Cross, Stevenage

**Roots of Jazz:** Friday 18<sup>th</sup> March- 7:45pm at Grace Community Church, Hydean Way, Stevenage

**Andy Kind Comedy Night:** Friday 1<sup>st</sup> April – 7:45pm at St Nicholas Church, Stevenage

The aim of these events is to gently introduce people to the Christian faith, have some fun and promote the main **Passion for Life** events which will take place in Letchworth in the week of 25<sup>th</sup> April. More details on those soon...!

**PRAYER GATHERINGS:** Our next Prayer Gathering is on Wednesday 9<sup>th</sup> February from 7:45pm. This will be in-person only at St Nicholas Church. Our next 7-8am early morning zoom prayer will be on Tuesday 15<sup>th</sup> February. Why not put those dates in your diary now and commit to coming along? The church will also be open for **visitors and private prayer** on Tuesdays from 2-4pm, Wednesdays from 12noon-2pm and Thursdays from 10am-12 noon. And if you'd like to join the band of church sitters, please speak to Karen Walker.

**READINGS FOR THE NEXT FEW WEEKS:** The readings for the next 3 weeks are as follows:

6<sup>th</sup> February: Matt 22:15-22

13<sup>th</sup> February: Matt 22:23-33

20<sup>th</sup> February: Matt 22:34-46

**LIVING IN LOVE AND FAITH.** A reminder that our 2-session course looking at the LLF materials will be from **6pm-8pm on Sunday 27<sup>th</sup> February and 6<sup>th</sup> March.** If you'd like to come, please let me or Martin Bailey know.

**LENT LECTURE: WHY WOMEN MATTER SO MUCH TO GOD.** St Thomas Becket, Northaw at 7:00pm on Wednesday 23rd February 2022. The speaker is Ros Clarke, a Christian teacher, speaker and writer, and the author of the Lent devotional book *Forty Women: unseen women of the Bible from Eden to Easter*, copies of which will be available to purchase at the lecture. More details including how to book can be found here: [Annual Lecture 2022 | Northaw & Cuffley \(norcuff.com\)](#)

**ST MARY'S GRAVELEY PCC MET LAST NIGHT:** As well as receiving reports from the Rector, Churchwardens and Treasurer, we spent time thinking through our new Mission Action Plan, particularly ways of attracting families with children and young people to church and the introduction of new hymn books.

**FLOWER ARRANGING:** If you'd like to join the Flower Arranging Team at St Nicholas, please see Chris Chambers – full training is given. Sessions are on Thursdays 10am-12pm, and 7-9pm at St Nicholas.

**CONVERSION THERAPY:** The government is currently undertaking a consultation process with regard to new legislation around *conversion therapy*. Conversion therapy is a term which has come to encompass a wide range of practices and therapies aimed at helping those who have unwanted same-sex attraction, or who have deep concerns around their gender identity. While there is rightly already legislation banning many brutal practices and all forms of coercive therapy where people are forced, perhaps by parents or friends, to undergo therapy when they have no wish to do so themselves, certain pressure groups are hoping to force the government to ban all and any conversations and practices in this area. This would mean that no adult could willingly ask for help or support to deal with unwanted feelings of same-sex attraction or confusion about their gender, and that church ministers and Christians could potentially be prosecuted for offering to talk and pray with someone, or perhaps even for suggesting that homosexual practice or transgender identity runs contrary to the teachings of God in the Bible.

This is deeply concerning to me, and to thousands of other clergy and pastoral workers up and down the country and many of us signed a petition to the government late last year in this regard. At that point, the consultation process was very short, but given the strength of views on this issue, the consultation process was extended and there is now an opportunity for everybody to think through this issue and to make their views known.

Can I encourage you to read the information here, on the site of the Christian Institute: [Broad 'conversion therapy' ban - The Christian Institute](#) : and to consider signing the petition here: [Ministers' Consultation Response – A Christian perspective \(ministersconsultationresponse.com\)](#) where more information is also available. Thank you.