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Briefing 101: Wednesday 9th February, 2022.

Dear friends,

For more encouragement in our life as disciples of Jesus, we turn back to Hebrews 12 again- as we will next week too. This time it's not to gaze around us as those who have run the race before, but to the one who brought us into the race in the first place: Jesus. Here's the next part of Hebrews 12.

"And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. 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." Hebrews 12:1b-3.

For the joy set before him...

The road Jesus had to walk was hard, harder than we can ever imagine. There has never been any suffering as great as that which the perfect Lamb of God willingly endured on the cross for us; no burden as heavy as the weight of sin he bore in our place; no darkness so dark as that which descended on that first Good Friday as the holy wrath of God against our sin and rebellion was poured out on Jesus, the innocent saviour; no loneliness so painful as that which, temporarily, drove a wedge between the eternal Son and his Father. For the joy...?

And whilst those things came as the culmination of Jesus' ministry, they weren't the only burdens he bore. Rejected by his own people, opposed by the religious authorities, doubted by his own family, betrayed by his disciples, worn down and wearied by those he came to teach and heal and save. For the joy...?

And what of his leaving home in the first place; not counting equality with God something to be grasped but laying aside his crown, putting off his glory and majesty to take on human flesh in the nature of a servant. We rightly marvel at the service our Queen has given over 70 years, yet not even her war-time service came close to the humility shown by Jesus as he walked where we walk, and was tested in every way, just as we are. And he did this for the joy set before him? Yes.

For the joy of seeing his Father glorified as both holy and righteous in punishing sin and as the father of all mercies and the God of all grace as lost, helpless sinners are brought home. For the joy of hearing the praises of God's children, as they sing their songs of redemption, having been freed from slavery to sin and death. For the joy of seeing lives transformed and his kingdom come on earth as it is in Heaven. For the joy of hearing and joining with the prayers of God's people as they make their requests to God in faith, knowing that their Father in Heaven loves to hear and answer their prayers. For the joy of seeing barriers of race and class and politics and wealth and education come down as God's people are moulded by the Spirit into one Body. For the joy of knowing that through his death there is now nothing that can separate God's children from his love. For the joy of knowing that through his death and resurrection, one day all sin and suffering will be gone forever when he returns in glory as King and Judge and ushers in his eternal kingdom where those he has redeemed will be with him forever. For those joys... and countless more.

And as we consider Jesus, as we fix our eyes on him, his race, his suffering, his victory, his joys, so our hearts are strengthened for the race we are called to run. So often in the midst of our struggles the cross we bear feels far too heavy, yet what is our suffering compared to his? What costs do we ever bear that measure up to his? What darkness or shame or separation do we ever endure that compares to his? And how great must his love for us be that he would endure that for us! Looking to Jesus brings us a sense of proportion, for if he carried **that** cross, then surely we can bear ours.

But when we consider Jesus we are pointed forward to the joy set before us. Without a robust doctrine of heaven, without the hope of eternal life and that glorious a reunion with the saints of old around God's throne filling the far horizon, we will easily be distracted, discouraged and dismayed. If Heaven is just wishful thinking then we have no hope and we are to be pitied more than all people. But praise God we do have a glorious and eternal hope, a certain hope of a time when we will experience the same joy that took Jesus from heaven to earth and to the cross. So keep going, my brothers and sisters! Consider Jesus, his earthly sufferings and his eternal joys, and keep going until the end!

Dave

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

NEW SONG FOR SUNDAY AT ST NICHOLAS: [Almost Home \(Official Lyric Video\) - Matt Papa & Matt Boswell - YouTube](#)

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 12th March – 7:45pm at Longmeadow Church, Oaks Cross, Stevenage

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

Andy Kind Comedy Night: Friday 1st 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 25th April. More details on those soon...!

PRAYER GATHERINGS: Our next Prayer Gathering is **TONIGHT** Wednesday 9th 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 15th 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.

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

13th February: Matt 22:23-33

20th February: Matt 22:34-46

27th February: Matt 23:1-39

LIVING IN LOVE AND FAITH. A reminder that our 2-session course looking at the LLF materials will be from **6pm-8pm on Sunday 27th February and 6th 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 \(norcuff.com\)](#)

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.

PERSECUTED CHURCH: On 15th February 2015, 21 believers, 20 of them Coptic Orthodox Christians, were executed by ISIS in Libya. To mark that day and to raise awareness of the ongoing plight of all those who are persecuted solely on the basis of faith or belief, REFCEMI, the Coptic Orthodox Office for Advocacy and Public Policy is holding an online event with speakers including His Eminence Archbishop Angaelos, Fiona Bruce MP, Prime Minister's Special Envoy for Freedom of Religion or Belief and The Lord Alton of Liverpool. It's free and the zoom link to the event which runs from 6pm-7pm on 15th February can be found here: www.Refcemi.org

DEANERY SYNOD: Everyone is invited to join deanery clergy and reps for Deanery Synod at 7:30pm on **Thursday 17th February at St Nicholas Church** where the guest speaker will be David White, the new Diocesan Secretary.

HELP NEEDED: We've often said that the church is a battleship not a cruise liner, where everyone has a role to play in active service. Right now, St Nicholas needs people to join the refreshments rota and more church sitters. St Mary's will soon need a new PCC secretary. Could you serve in one of these ways? Speak to Dave or one of the Church wardens for more details.

LENT 2022. We're not having a special Lent course this year, but I'd like to suggest 2 ways to make the most of Lent and use it as a time of preparation.

1: Quiet Evening Prayer: For the 7 Wednesdays of Lent, we are restarting a quiet service of evening prayer in St Nicholas Church. This will run from 7pm to 7:30pm starting on Ash Wednesday with imposition of ashes.

2: Read and Pray: From this Sunday there will be a range of short books available, all priced at £2 each. Why not take one and find someone to read it with, making time each week- in person, on the phone or Zoom - to chat and pray through what you've read. It would be a great way to deepen your faith and deepen your friendship.