

I go to the gym a bit. It's good for me. It's good for my mental health. It keeps me fit. Because I put on weight easily, it holds that under control.

One of the things that I have noticed this year, is that there are new faces around the weights, the bikes, and the running machines. Dressed in new gym gear and seemingly, very energetic, but if you are an old hand, you can tell they are new and have just started coming.

You can tell this by the way they use the machines, and do their exercises.

The other thing is of course, you see whether they stay or not.

This month people have made new year's resolutions and have worked up the courage and the motivation to get started. Now they are there and it's time to put in the hard yards and make it work.

In many ways this gym story is a picture of how our Epiphany readings work.

The Isaiah reading is the promise of Epiphany, the promised revelation. The movement from the dimness to blinding light. From hunger to fullness. From slavery to freedom.

This is our new year's resolution. We have decided that it is time for things to change and we are going to get moving. In this instance, get fitter and head off to the gym. Nothing has happened yet, but we have decided to go. It is all promise.

The gospel reading is the actual revelation of Jesus, the promised one of God. In Galilee of the Gentiles, the promise is fulfilled. He speaks and Andrew, Peter, James, and John drop everything and follow. Jesus teaches and proclaims the new news that God's kingdom has arrived. Showing that this is truth by curing every disease and sickness.

This is the act of getting to the gym for the first time. We have our new gym clothes, our new programme and our goals in place and we are there to get started. Jesus has arrived.

The 1 Corinthians reading is Paul letting us know how this revelation is to be worked out in the church. The hard discipline of making it work. Of taking the majesty of God's revelation to us all in God's son; Jesus, and making that real in our love for one another and the world. This is us keeping up at the gym and working on our plans. This is the hard work and discipline of making it all happen.

This the practical outworking of it all.

And this is what Paul is talking about in our reading from 1 Corinthians. The practical outworking of Epiphany. And he says, very plainly, that a divided church is a failure. Especially when it is in the mistaken belief that this is wisdom. Especially when "this wisdom" goes on to boast, "our divided way is the only way."

Paul says ... this is failure.

This is not about churches having distinctives. This is not about churches doing things their way. This is about the spiritual arrogance that says, "We are right and everyone else is wrong." I belong to Paul. No, I belong to Cephas.

Paul says ... this is failure.

"You must get along with each other," he says.

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This is success ... That we love one another. That our common bond in the Cross of Christ is what holds us together, is "to those of us who believe ... the power of God for salvation." That the cross which is Gods show of love for us ... is to be the bond which helps us to love one another.

For Paul, this is ... getting on ...

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Deciding to go to the gym is good.

Getting there for the first time, with all our nice new clothes, goals, hopes, and dreams is awesome.

But keeping on going requires hard work.

Loving one another requires hard work. Being there for one another requires hard work. Putting aside our differences requires hard work. Overlooking slights and disagreements requires hard work. Forgiving one another requires hard work. Letting go of the past, requires hard work. Giving people you don't like a second chance, requires hard work. A 100<sup>th</sup> chance ... hard work.

Keeping on being the church, day after day, week after week, month after month, year after year, decade after decade, requires hard work.

Getting on ... requires hard work.

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But Jesus going to the cross, wasn't an easy ride, either!

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Paul says to us, because of God's love for us, shown in Christ on the cross ... let's get on.

We all know ... it requires hard work ...

but isn't hard work ... what Jesus did for us?

Thanks be to God.