

‘Giving our all for God’  
LEP & Fusion Joint Celebration Service  
2 September, 2012

How many of you have been following the Paralympic Games? What’s been most exciting to you so far? How are you feeling about Team GB?

If you hadn’t figured it out already, our theme at the annual Summer Holiday Club in Wheatley was all about being a member of the team—not Team GB, but a bigger one. All the participants were made members of different teams—Europe, Australasia, Americas, and then of various countries of those continents. But the point was to consider what it means to be a member of Jesus’ team, which goes beyond geographic boundaries and includes members from every country in the world.

Each day we would all come together at the front to light the massive torch, and to sing a few songs—some of which you’re hearing and singing this morning: singing is good for the **heart** and **soul**. We also would do some warm-ups: running on the spot, star jumps, bending, stretching—warm-ups are good for the **body’s strength**.

Next, the children were asked to share what they liked about the day before: it’s good for the **mind** to reflect on what’s happened, and to identify the good things. It’s an important component of gratitude. And it’s good to share our positive thoughts with others; amazing how contagious it can be!

After that bit of sharing, the theme and Bible story for the day were introduced with the help of our summer club puppets (Lucy & Ben) and a few members of the youth team. Then we would all divide up by continents and take turns engaging in craft activities, sporting games, and what we called Bible discovery, where we talked about what the Bible has to say about being on Jesus’ team.

Each day during the Bible discovery session, the kids viewed video testimonials from Christian Olympic and Paralympic athletes. The athletes reflected on the challenges of being an Olympian: it calls for drive, discipline, and determination. It means sometimes doing things you’re not necessarily in the mood to do in the moment, in order to become the person you really want to be in the bigger picture. It requires sacrifice and commitment: the best athletes spend hours and hours training at their sport, and they have to be sure to maintain healthy diets and get plenty of rest, or else their performance suffers.

In order to succeed, though, the athletes said one of the most important things was to have a supportive team alongside them. Their support teams were the ones who cheered them on when they felt discouraged, or challenged them when they weren’t giving it 100%. Their support teams included parents, coaches, family, and those who trained with them.

But the most important member of their support team, they said, was God. Every one of those extraordinary athletes talked about how important their relationship with God was to them: knowing that on their best days, and on their worst days, God was and is always with them—giving them the strength to get through whatever it was, good or bad, and loving them even when they felt they’d failed. They drew connections between the work they had to do for their sport and the work they also had to do to grow and excel in their faith.

Church is where “Team Jesus” meets to support and encourage each other; to learn and train side by side with others who are trying to be the best *they* can be. Let’s face it: it’s not always easy

to be a Christian. People have wrong ideas about us, and we don't always have the right ideas about each other. That can be very discouraging. People sometimes don't treat Christians very kindly—and that makes some of us want to hide our faith, or keep it secret. And sometimes, Christians don't treat other Christians—or people who aren't Christians—very kindly. And when that happens, it's obvious that they've forgotten what Jesus said is the most important thing. What was that again?

“Jesus said, the most important commandment is this: Love the Lord your God with all your **heart** and with all your **soul** and with all your **mind** and with all your **strength**. And love your neighbour as yourself.” (Mark 12:29-31)

Churches are places where people who want to be on God's team can go to practise, train, learn with others how to be more like Jesus. Just as athletes have off days, or haven't yet perfected their skills so they make false moves—we, too, will fail at times, both inside and outside our churches. But healthy church communities work together to forgive past mistakes, help one another up out of the dust, encourage each other to do better in the future, and remind one another that in all things, we are endeavouring to love God with heart, soul, mind, and strength—and to love all our neighbours as we love ourselves.

In a word, being a member of 'Team Jesus' is all about L-O-V-E, love. Love involves trust and faith and a willingness to dedicate ourselves to something greater than ourselves. As Christians, we recognise that love was demonstrated most perfectly when God came to us in the person of Jesus Christ, who taught us about how God calls each of us by name; has the power to quiet the storms that rage in our lives; and gives us courage to ask for what we need when we have faith.

Most of all, Jesus taught us about the unfathomable power and determination of divine love. So great was God's love, so deep was God's desire to be in relationship with us, that he took on our form and suffered the worst that humanity was capable of serving up, even to the point of death on a cross.

But the astonishing, amazing thing about divine love is that nothing—not treachery, not deceit, not epic human failure, not even the most excruciating kind of death—is strong enough to kill it. Jesus' execution on the cross could have been the end of his story. But it wasn't. Love prevailed. The resurrection of Jesus eclipsed his death, and assured us all of a life that can be truly, fully alive. In a magnificent demonstration of how the dark forces of this world cannot put out the **flame** of God's love, cannot stop the Holy Spirit from accomplishing great things even with our stumbling failures, God's love prevailed.

Friends, it was that divine flame that burned brightly this past week at the Wheatley Park School. It was the same Holy Spirit animating Jesus that was swirling around those school grounds in Holton from Tuesday through Friday, and is moving among us even now.

Let us set our sights on the One who showed us how it's done. Let us honour the One who lives and moves and makes his dwelling place within us and beyond us. And let us share that love which can be neither stifled nor contained, all to the glory of God. Amen.