

Friends

I am writing this the day after a historic occasion... Newcastle United have just won their first trophy in 70 years! Regarded as a big club with a huge fan following, it has been a sore point for a long time that such a prestigious club hasn't won anything in recent times.

Football is a funny thing. So many emotions, hopes and dreams projected on to the fate of a ball being hoofed about for 90 mins by 11 men a-side.

The singing is louder and more enthusiastic than any other worship I have ever heard. Full of defiance when the opposition seems to prevail, full of memories of victories past, and songs foretelling the glory to come.

The anger at injustice easily let loose. Hope quickly rekindled. Tears of relief easily flow.

The Church of Football is thriving, it is accessible and meaningful to so many.

It satisfies that yearning to belong, that deep human need to be known and accepted. It offers community where others who share the same faith come together as one.

My father-in-law is 70 this year. He has waited his whole life to see Newcastle win a trophy. My husband 38 years. The last few minutes of the game were nervy when the other team scored one and victory looked less assured. The final whistle went and the emotional release was huge. The jumping, the cheering, the disbelief – we actually won!

Half an hour later, we were emptying the dishwasher, putting the kids to bed, then falling asleep in front of the telly. Because as long hoped for as it was, as hard won as it was, as historic as it was, this victory didn't actually change anything. Even the players themselves were quickly on to training for the next match and away playing for international teams.

For all the hoping, for all the dreaming, this victory didn't change anything.

As my family and I were gathered around the TV, getting more and more excited about what could possibly be, I said to them... you know this feeling, this feeling that we are about to win, against the odds, hopes about to be made real... that is what the resurrection feels like. Yes! Get in! Euphoria! Its happened. Can you believe it?! Its actually happened. Our side has won! We are on the winning team! Yes! Yes! Yes!

But that is where the similarities with Easter end. Because unlike Newcastle's historic trophy, Jesus' victory did change everything. That's what the church celebrates at Easter and in fact every Sunday. That Jesus overcame death. In doing so he has given us every reason to hope that we will all win in the end and forever if we trust and follow him.

From Sunday 13 April through to Sunday 20 April St John's will be exploring Jesus' last days, who he was, why he did what he did, what happened next and what it means for us today. Join in if you can. If you cannot physically be with us, why not commit to reading and reflecting on this part of the gospel for yourself and praying this Holy Week?

Look at the faith of football fans, have we not got something bigger and better to believe in?
Let us commit more of ourselves to the following the One who can lead us to an all-
changing and everlasting victory and truly lead us to glory.

He is Risen! Hallelujah! He is Risen indeed!

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