

Staying Fresh

Psalm 1
1 Corinthians 15:12-20

February 17, 2019
Faith Community

Plans were recently announced for the return of the Red Bull 400, the world's steepest race uphill to the top of Copper Peak's 40 story tall ski jumping tower in Iron Mountain. It's part of the burgeoning extreme sports industry, recreation with an edge, shall we say.

Of course there are all kinds of extreme sports, but I'm partial to extreme eating.

"One of the most fearsome competitive eaters in the world is Hirofumi Nakajima of Kofu, Japan. He's a regular competitor and sometimes champion of Nathan's Famous Fourth of July Hot Dog Eating Contest on Coney Island.

"For one of his Coney Island victories Mr. Nakajima ate 24 and ½ hot dogs (including buns) in 12 minutes. He has also put away 50 sushi in one minute and 6 and ½ pounds of sweet potatoes in half an hour.

"He's good not only in sprints but can go the distance as well. He consumed 15 bowls of noodle soup, 100 pieces of sushi, five plates of wheat noodles, five plates of beef over rice, and five plates of curry over rice, in a single lunch.

"One other thing you need to know about Mr. Nakajima, otherwise known as the Black Hole of Japan. He stands five feet, eight inches tall. He weighs 135 pounds. He has a thirty-inch waist. When asked for the secret of his success, he replies, "I hate to lose."¹

It would appear that extreme anything takes an activity we engage in and turns it into something more.

You can do a few laps at the pool, or you can swim the English Channel. You can super-size it at your local fast food place or you can slurp down 58 bowls of rice cake soup in one sitting.

You can go to church or you can get into extreme Jesus. That's an entirely different world.

¹ Rick Reilly, "An All-Consuming Hunger for Victory" [Sports Illustrated](#).

We're good folks. We work hard. We stay out of trouble. We pay our taxes. We even show up at places like this when we can.

And in the process we've settled for the Jesus who wouldn't hurt a fly. Who was polite. Who never rocked the boat, always said the right things, and in whose name we cultivate a well to do predictability.

That kind of Jesus will never change the world, let alone equip you for a God honoring life.

Annie Dillard compares the good intentions people have when they go to church with well meaning but ill conceived travels to the North Pole. She uses the Franklin Expedition of 1845 as a good example. One hundred thirty eight officers and men carried a "1,200 volume library, a hand-organ playing fifty tunes, china place settings, cut glass wine goblets, sterling silver flatware, and no special clothing for the Arctic, only the uniforms of Her Majesty's Navy. It was a noble enterprise, and they were nobly dressed for it. They all died. Their bodies were found with pieces of backgammon board and table silver engraved with officers' initials and family crests. Dignity was all.

"Sir Robert Falcon Scott had a different kind of dignity: he thought the purity of polar explorations required a purity of effort unassisted by dogs or companions. He didn't make it either.

"The ones who did weren't that fussy. They knew they could not do it alone. They let go of their roles, their privileges, their preconceived notions, and got the job done.

Annie Dillard sums it up like this: "Why do we church people seem like cheerful, brainless tourists on a packaged tour of the Absolute? It is madness to get guzzied up when we go to church; we should all be wearing crash helmets. Ushers should hand out life preservers and signal flares; they should lash us to our pews."² That's extreme Jesus.

Do you remember the movie, The Passion of the Christ? Jim Caviezel played the lead, and in doing so would sometimes get up as early as 2:00am and spend eight hours in makeup. He dislocated his shoulder while carrying the cross, came down with pneumonia and a lung infection. He got a little too close to a lightning strike while doing a scene

² Eugene Peterson, "Annie Dillard: With Her Eyes Open" Theology Today (no Later than 1986) pp. 187-9.

from the Sermon On the Mount, and got a 14-inch gash in his back when one of the whippings got a bit too authentic.

During the crucifixion scene crewmembers wore gloves and coats because of the cold while Jesus hung on the cross wearing just a loincloth.

Friends, this is the extreme Jesus. This is the Jesus who doesn't wait for a certain time or place to be 'religious.' Instead, he sees God in everything from a woman looking for what she'd lost to a man hoping against hope that his wayward son will come home.

This is the Jesus who sees God's love and care in a field of wild flowers.

This is the Jesus who hangs out with the losers of the world and turns away from the stuffed shirt religious types who think they're hotter than the latest iPhone.

This is the Jesus who prays with his eyes open.

This is the Jesus who faces reality head on.

This is the Jesus who knows what it is to affirm hope even in the darkest times, who offers us new life on this side of the grave as well as the other.

"New every morning is your love," the psalmist writes. The extreme Jesus knows that. So can you.

A group of American soldiers was stationed in London during World War I. They received orders that the next day they would go to the front. The church many of them attended gave them a hastily prepared dinner.

It was actually a good time, and the conversation was light and upbeat. Before wrapping up, one of the soldiers was asked to say a few words of appreciation. As he brought his speech to a close he said, 'Tomorrow we're leaving for France, and the trenches, and to die.' He hadn't meant to say that last part. Looking around with embarrassment, struggling for something to say, he asked, 'Can anyone tell us how to die?' There was a terribly awkward silence. Then someone walked quietly to the piano and began to play and sing the old gospel hymns. In the quiet that followed, everyone's soul was forced to deal with the questions of life and death. Without anyone planning it,

a party became a prayer meeting in which they had to turn to God.”³

That is extreme Jesus too.

Friends, do not settle for a religious routine. Do not put up with life as usual. You waste away when you do that. Do not go to your grave with your good intentions or great potential still intact.

We’ve got all the good things anyone could ask for, and yet as a culture we’re starving for purpose, we’re hungry for hope, and we keep going, we keep pushing, and we keep trying, thinking, “Maybe this will do it.” The secret is actually the opposite. Learn from the ill-fated polar expeditions. All that stuff didn’t just get in the way; it killed the mission and killed them.

Friends, you’re one month away from the arrival of your new pastor. The best thing you can do in preparation is to renew your commitment to Christ and the world he died to save. In other words, learn to love and live with extreme Jesus.

³ Dynamic Preaching, Vol.XVII, No.1, Jan.-Mar., 2004, p. 79.