

Introduction

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Here's What You Need to Keep Going!

more encouragement ... more victory ... more forgiveness ... more protection ... more comfort

More Encouragement

The apostle John didn't know if he should keep going. At the end of his life, he was treated like a prisoner on Alcatraz and exiled to the island of Patmos, surrounded by the choppy waters of the Mediterranean Sea, all because he proclaimed the Word of God and testified to Jesus. But then he was smacked with this vision of heaven that knocked him to his knees, and he got exactly what he needed to keep going! He received more encouragement. ***After this I looked, and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb.*** John felt so alone on this island, isolated from Roman civilization, isolated from his congregation he loved so much, isolated from his home back in Ephesus. But what did he see? A great multitude. This is the ultimate fulfillment of the promise given to Abraham of old, that his descendants would be this innumerable multitude, like the stars in the sky and the sand on the seashore, a multitude that would encompass people from all nations on earth. This great multitude incorporates the saints from all times and all places.

So often we feel like John. We come on Sundays, and five minutes before church starts, we look around and wonder, "Is this it?" We look at the statistics of our synod and can't help but see this slow but steady decline from our hay day. We look at the current levels of youth participation and worry if we'll be able to make it twenty or thirty years from now. Here's what you need to keep going! More encouragement! You are not this isolated island of a congregation, this tiny group that can only hope to hold on for dear life. You are part of something bigger and better than yourself, part of this gigantic, gargantuan multitude that no one can count! With all those people surrounding you to encourage you, don't give up. Keep going!

More Victory

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So often we feel like John. We feel like the Christian church in America is losing. We feel like we are this mediocre team from this tiny college who comes into Michigan Stadium on opening weekend just to get blown out. We feel like all we can do is lick our wounds, salvage some decency, tip our hat to the superior opponent, and go back to the privacy of our homes and bury our head in our hands. Here's what you need to keep going! More victory! You're not on the losing team! You not bound to face off against your coworkers who don't want to hear about religion or your own children who don't want to step foot in church, throw up your hands in exasperation, and exclaim, "Well, what can you do?" You're on the winning team! Your Savior Jesus has crushed the competition of sin, death, and the devil, and his resurrection and ascension guarantees that his victory is yours. With this great victory lap around the stadium, filled with fans waving palm branches, don't give up! Keep going!

More Forgiveness

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So often we feel like John. We can look back on all the years of our lives and see all the sin piling up in the rear view mirror. We have tried to break our bad habits, but just like a nervous schoolgirl constantly biting her fingernails, we feel helpless to do anything about it. We have told ourselves to try harder to do more good in our lives, but we have to admit that so many of our good intentions are left by the wayside as life speeds on by. Here's what you need to keep going! More forgiveness! You're not bound to be stuck in this cesspool of shame, this trap of

transgressions, this garbage pile of guilt. Jesus' blood acts as the most powerful version of Tide Pods with Oxi Boost + Ultra Stain Release to get out every last sin better than any bleach ever could! With forgiveness that is always more than our many sins, don't give up! Keep going!

More Protection

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So often we feel like John. We wander through life like the Israelites wandered through the wilderness for forty years. We see so many faint paths lying before us, and as they stretch off to the hazy horizon, we don't really know where they're going. We look around us and can only see the scary mountains and the ravenous wolves and the treacherous dangers that are all threatening our lives and our souls. Here's what you need to keep going! More protection! You're not an exhausted sheep that is just going to keel over under the desert sun or a helpless sheep that is just going to get pounced on in the middle of nowhere by the howling wolves. Your Good Shepherd will lead you through the wilderness of this life, until you reach the Promised Land, where everything that makes this sojourn so hard—the hunger, the thirst, the weakness, the struggles—will be eliminated once and for all. With protection to guide you every step of the way, don't give up! Keep going!

More Comfort

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So often we feel like John. I know I'm not the only one here who, on All Saints' Day, can't help but think about your mother who has died in the faith. Or your father. Or your brother or sister. Or the members of our congregation—like Doris Buettner, John Burr, Dick Miller, Ruth Sell, and many others. Here's what you need to keep going! More comfort! You don't need to feel like there will be no end to the grief and tears and raw emotion. Your risen and ever-living Christ says, "I know what it's like to face death. I have conquered the grave, and I have brought all these saints from the grave to glory everlasting. And I will do the same for you too!" With the comfort of all our tears wiped away, don't give up! Keep going!

Conclusion

In November 1940, the Nazis bombed the city of Coventry, England. The town and its cathedral were destroyed. After the war, the church decided to leave the ruins in place and build a new church next to it. In the new cathedral they built a large glass wall, etched with saints and angels ten feet tall. Right outside that large glass wall was their old bombed-out cathedral. How could they keep going? They had to look through the vision of saints and angels to deal with the rubble of this life.¹ We may not have bombs falling overhead like the people in Ukraine, Israel, or Gaza, but sometimes we feel like we should just give up. What do we need to keep going? This overwhelming vision from Revelation! Holy smokes, it's jam packed: five things to keep us going! All the encouragement, all the victory, all the forgiveness, all the protection, all the comfort you need is right here! So face all the rubble in your life by looking through this vision of the saints and angels in heaven. Amen.

¹ Adapted from Jonathan Schroeder, Commentary on the Propers, Year A (Waukesha, WI: Northwestern, 2022), 330.

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