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THE BEST IS YET TO COME

Pastor Noel Due

Ageing isn't easy, for lots of reasons:

We're simply not able to do what we used to. Things that were a cinch—even second nature—become hard. Energy fades. We're in the company of new companions: illness, pain, stiffness...and wrinkles. We sometimes wonder who is that looking back at me from the mirror?

And the longer we live the more we must face. Not just the loss of friends and relatives, but faculties and abilities. Sight, sound, smell and touch all fade. Our strength declines, our skills grow blunt, our great achievements become distant memories. And even memory itself...now, what was I saying? I've lost my train of thought...you know how it goes.

Yet, we're the same person. We know ourselves. The memories are ours; unique to us. The history we've shared with so many friends and our families; it's our history. Nobody else in the whole wide world has that story. We've learned so much, come so far, experienced so many peaks and troughs. We're older. And wiser.

Yet, it remains that we can't do what we used to. Our working lives finish. Our families don't need us as much. We can't care for the house or garden like we used to. And because we're so used to doing so much, we feel the loss. More limited, increasingly dependent on others—we used to be the doers. Now others do for us.

As Bette Davis once said: "old age ain't no place for sissies".

The older we get the more courage we need. The more our bodies decline, the more our inner selves must find new strength. We need hope day by day, even moment by moment.

And there is hope, but it doesn't come from ourselves.

One thing is inescapable. No matter how old we grow, no one lives forever. Death has a perfect batting average: 100%.

Growing older gets us used to that fact.

When you're young, you never think about it. There's too much potential. Life is before you. But, the truth is this: young people aren't living the dream, they're living the illusion. They think they're immortal, that they can do anything. The world lies before them, life is ahead. The illusion is this: they think they can do it all on their own. Their strength, their plans, their abilities.

It's never been that way. The older you get, the more you can see it. Jesus said, "My power is made perfect in weakness".

It's never been about our strength, our plans or our abilities. God has always been at work; getting us to see that without him we can do nothing.

As we get older we're forced to face that daily.

We grow more dependent on God, and more aware of our need for him. Not just for strength, but for forgiveness.

Why? Because a life lived long will inherently involve mistakes. Sometimes the memory of them overwhelm us. The poor decisions, broken relationships, or shattered hopes; the regrets can become crushing. But our mistakes and errors don't have the last say; Jesus' love does. He's able to work even our most dreadful mistakes into something beautiful. He's able to forgive, even when we can't forget. We need to know it more than ever. And when we can accept that forgiveness there's so much else to look back on. The good times, the happy memories, the astounding breadth of experience that fills even one life; it's beyond calculation.

But, even if most of this life is behind you, what lies ahead?

My mum was the youngest of 13. Her 12 brothers and sisters all died before her. Not to mention her husband, and nearly all her nieces and nephews. And her own parents. She was indeed a woman of sorrows and acquainted with grief.

My wife often works as a doctor on remote indigenous communities; the sorry business is continual. So many deaths. So much sadness. So many funeral ceremonies. So much pain.

It's not just that we die, but that we lose so much along the way. So now that most of this life is behind us. What lies ahead?

As our outer bodies fade, our inner selves can reach new levels of faith, and hope.

My wife sometimes reminds me, "My love, this world is not yet heaven". How well we know that! Especially on a bad day; a grief filled day, or a day when our physical pain is really bad.

We look and long —more and more it seems—for the world to come, for the world Jesus promised, the one he told us to pray for: "Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth, as in heaven".

In the midst of pain and frustration, loss and grief, we can rely on him. We can trust his promise to be with us, no matter what. We can let the pain of our arthritis or the frustration of our failing memory be the cue: "this world is not yet heaven. That is still to come". And come it will, in the inevitability of our last breath on this earth. But as that breath leaves us, our next draws in the air of heaven.

Jesus said to his friends "anyone who believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?". Those words are as true today as when he first spoke them. "Anyone who believes in me will never die" Not even when our bodies give up the ghost. Not even when they're finally laid to rest. Even then, life is just beginning.

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