

November 20, 2022

NUTS AND BOLTS

Colossians 1:11-20

Discovery Channel program: May Day.

British Airways Flight 5390 was a scheduled passenger flight between Birmingham Airport in England and Málaga Airport in Spain. On 10th June 1990, an improperly installed panel of the windscreen failed, causing the plane's captain, Tim Lancaster, to be sucked halfway out of the aircraft.

Accident investigators found that a replacement windscreen had been installed 27 hours before the flight, and that the procedure had been approved by the shift maintenance manager. However, 84 of the 90 windscreen retention bolts were 0.66 mm too small in diameter. The investigation revealed that the windscreen had been replaced without reference to the maintenance documentation in order to save time, as the plane was due to take off soon and there was a tight schedule.

The maintenance manager was found responsible for installing the incorrect bolts and for failing to follow official British Airways policies.

What this tells us is that no matter how well-designed an aircraft is, how fast it can travel, how much it can carry, or how comfortable it is; it will fall apart without the correct bolts and nuts.

As it is with the aircraft, so is it with all of life.

Everything in all of creation consists of many components; from the tiny molecule – invisible to the naked eye to the towering mountains; from the simple bicycle that our kids ride, to the complex satellite orbiting space; everything consists of many parts. And while the parts are important for the functioning of the whole, even more important, are the things that hold those parts together.

This goes not just for physical objects; it applies to relationships as well.

Illustration from marriage:

A couple were married for 30 years; they got along very well; never had any major fights in their marriage, were never abusive to each other, were never unfaithful. They were very pleasant and gentle persons individually and as a couple. But after 30 years of marriage, they divorced. They divorced after the last of their two children got married. It turned out that while they admired and respected each other, the only thing that kept the marriage together was the children. Years before, they had come to the realization that they were not compatible, but they stayed together for the sake of the children, but now that the children were grown and had their own families, the glue that held the marriage together had lost its hold.

Everything in life; animate and inanimate, physical and relational, all have something that holds them together. And things are able to survive and function effectively as long as that which holds them together continues to be strong.

Individually, we are complex creations.

There are many factors, all interlinked, that go into making us who we are and determine the measure of enjoyment and fulfilment we find in life.

If any part of our bodies is not functioning as it should, it affects our quality of life.

If our minds are not at ease, it affects our quality of life.

If our relationships are broken or shaky, it affects our quality of life.

We are members of our society and our world, and when there is tension and fear and injustice in our society and our world, it affects us.

Our families and relationships survive and thrive for as long as that which holds them together remains strong.

We flourish as individuals as long as that which keeps our life together holds firm.

Sometimes we find ourselves struggling to keep it together – we face those moments when it seems as if things are going to fall apart - we struggle with life. We have difficulty falling asleep; we don't eat as we should; we can't focus as we need to; we don't laugh as often as before. Things seem to be closing in on us, and the pressure is building.

When we face the shocks and changes, the pressures and stresses that threaten to tear our lives apart, what is it that holds our lives together? And can that thing withstand the stresses and pressures of life? Because if it cannot, you can be certain that we will fall apart.

For many, when things happen that threaten their well-being, they develop coping mechanisms, such as:

- Denial – refusal to accept reality.
- Numbing - "turn off" our emotional reaction so that we can do what we need to do to survive.
- Distraction.

Those things may help us to cope for a while, but they are not lasting solutions; they are all short-term fixes, and eventually, the pressure will get to us.

How then do we keep ourselves from falling apart?

The Apostle Paul, speaking of Jesus, says in our reading from Colossians 1, verses 15 – 17:

*“He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation; ¹⁶for in him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers—all things have been created through him and for him. ¹⁷He himself is before all things, **and in him all things hold together.**”*

Christ is the glue; he is the bolts and nuts that hold our life together, and that is so because he helps us to put things in perspective and see beyond the present.

Christ, by his life, death and resurrection, gives meaning to our lives; our struggles, pains and hopes.

So many things happen to us, and to persons known to and loved by us, that leave us asking why? Why did such circumstance befall me, or a loved one, or a friend?

There are many good people who struggle in life, and we wonder why is there so much unfairness and injustice, and brokenness in the world.

When we centre our lives around Christ, he helps us to see life not just as it is, but as it can and will ultimately be. He not only points us to the cause of our brokenness, but in his life, death and resurrection, we get to see how it will all end.

Jesus has shown us that God will lift up the fallen, that God will restore that which was broken, that God will correct the wrongs that we face, that God will reverse the acts of injustice.

Through him, we know that there will be resurrection and reconciliation.

In Colossians 1: 19 & 20, we read: *“For in him (i.e. in Jesus) all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, ²⁰and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross.”*

To reconcile means to bring into agreement or harmony; to do what needs to be done to hold things together.

That is what Christ does; he holds our lives together. He gives meaning to our lives enabling us to see beyond our present troubles and struggles, to a fuller and fairer future, and he challenges and empowers us to work for that better future.

How do we centre our lives around Christ?

We do so by intentionally and consistently pursuing those things that help to build and strengthen the relationship we have with him: things such as praying, reading of scripture, asking for his guidance and learning about him from the teaching, wisdom and experiences of others.

And just as important, we centre our lives on him, when we set out to live as he has shown us: loving God with our whole being and loving others as we love ourselves; acting with courage and compassion as he would, and doing justice, showing kindness, and walking humbly with our God as he did.

We are God’s, and the Church of which we are a part is Christ’s Church, and he is able to hold all things together; enabling us to be strong with all the strength that comes from his glorious power.

Thanks be to God.

Rev. Sydney Elias