

24th May 2020

Rest

“They that wait on the Lord shall renew their strength.”

Bible, Isaiah 40:31

Why do tennis players bounce the ball so much before they serve? (*They didn't go through all that malarkey in my young day ...* I hear some of you say!) Andy Murray was once asked why *he* did it. Somewhat prosaically he replied, “I just do it because everyone else does it.”

Some players, however, will tell you differently: it steadies the nerves; it helps get the body in the right position for the power of the serve; you need to know how high a particular ball will bounce or travel from the serve itself; it's about muscle-memory, because doing the same thing over and over again reminds the body what to do next ... Or it may just allow some players a moment to catch their breath after a long rally.

In 2006 the *British Journal of Sports Medicine* reported that, in monitoring the heart rates of tennis players, the receiver regularly had a lower heart rate than the server. So, bouncing the ball helps reduce the server's heart rate in a few seconds, to give the body a better chance to get things right. A few seconds rest ... and the body's in better shape.

The book of Genesis gives us the image of the Creator resting on the seventh day. Christians use their seventh day, a Sunday, as a day in which they give themselves to worship – and to rest. In some cultures and traditions, the day of rest comes with strictures: no work or socialising; engagement in prayerful activities; time to honour the day. But, one way or another, it's about rest, standing back from the rigours of the week and finding the restoration we need so much.

Rather than going pell-mell from one thing to another, wouldn't it be better if *we* took even a few seconds of rest before we serve: calming ourselves down; making time for prayer and reflection; finding some space? Goodness! It looks like the tennis players have got something to teach us after all. Game, set and match to them, don't you think?

A prayer for today

“O rest in the Lord. Wait patiently for him” – Psalm 37:7

Lord, remind me, please, that when I am at rest, I am resting in you. Amen.

An original reflection by © Tom Gordon

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