

2nd October 2024

Riding

"The knights come riding, two and two."

Alfred, Lord Tennyson, *Camelot*

I don't know why, but I've always enjoyed horse racing – the "Sport of Kings". Flat racing or over fences; famous races, like The Derby or the Grand National; "ordinary" racing, like meetings at our local racecourse at Musselburgh; long races or short sprints. When the knights of the racecourse come riding, "two and two" or twenty-two, I just love it!

I've been musing on Scripture, pondering a modern equivalent of St Paul's "whole armour of God" metaphor from his Epistle to the Ephesians. And I found myself watching a series of programmes about jump-racing in the UK, a "behind the scenes" documentary. As the jockeys in the weighing room began to get kitted out before a race, I got to thinking ...

It's nearly race time. The big one! It'll be tough, but I know you're up for it. So make sure you have all your kit organised. You need to be ready for what's to come. If not, you could be in serious trouble. The Jockey Club expects it of you. And anyway, you know you could have a nasty fall. How many bones have you broken already? So, you need to take as much care as possible. Look at the others. They're getting ready too. You need to be properly kitted out, all the stuff you need. Then you'll be as ready as you can be. You've got all the gear. It's there for your benefit.

Get your colours ready. See, they're hanging on your peg! Then we'll know who you're riding for. It's true what they say – looking the part matters. Your chest-protector first, though. That's the rule. All-round body protection – ribs, lungs, spine. It's the sensible thing. No use taking unnecessary risks. Riding boots! Of course! That's a given. Protection too, but they'll feel right in the stirrups. Proper control! Now, the goggles. Mud! Rain! It'll be heavy ground. Goodness, you could be in a right mess! And your riding helmet. Did you ever see a rider without one? No, of course not. And even though it's bedecked with your colours, it's the quality, the safety, that matters. Kicked by a horse after a fall, and concussion could be the least of it.

Ready? Excellent! It's time to get to the parade ring for saddling up. Everything's ready, and it looks like you are too. Oh, and remember, you're a good rider. Take a firm grip of the reins. You know what to do. You've got what you need. So go on! Give it your best shot. We're all rooting for you.

A prayer for today

Give me a leg-up, will you? It'll be a tough race. But I'm ready to go!