

Rev. Janet Doyle
Elmer Presbyterian Church
6th Sunday after Pentecost
Sunday, July 17, 2022
Scripture: Hebrews 12: 1-3

Sermon: Endurance

In 1968, the Olympics were held in Mexico City. The last runner to finish the marathon was a man from Tanzania. During the race, he broke his leg. He stumbled and was hurt badly, he was bruised, beaten up, and bloody. Long after everybody else had finished the race and the stadium was almost empty, only 7,000 people remained to the very end. Around 7:00 pm in the evening, as it was getting dark, this last runner entered to do his final lap to finish the marathon.

The crowd gave him a standing ovation. Later he was asked, “Why didn’t you quit when you were hurt, bruised and discouraged? Why didn’t you quit?”

He said, “My country did not send me 7,000 miles around the world to start the race, but to finish it.”

The Bible teaches very clearly that life is a race of perseverance and endurance. Unfortunately, most people don’t know that it is a race. Most people don’t know that they have a purpose for living beyond their own happiness and desires. Some people get sidetracked or distracted and others get disqualified. For one reason or another, many people die with unfilled dreams, with unrealized potential and without becoming what God intended their life to become. God wants us to finish the race strong and to finish it with him running with us across the finish line.

We need to run the race so that God is pleased with us. As believers, we need to run the race individually and also as a community of faith because we need each other.

The Apostle Paul said, “I consider my life worth nothing to me, if only I may finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me – the task of testifying to the gospel of God’s grace.” (Acts 20:24)

At the end of Paul’s life, Paul could say, “The time of my death is near. I have fought a good fight, I have finished the race, and I have remained faithful.” (1 Timothy 4:7-8)

Are we able to say that about our lives? Can you say that you are running the race with God as your coach?

Chapter 10 of Hebrews, verse 35-36 says, “So do not throw away this confident trust in the Lord. Remember the great reward it brings you! Patient endurance is what you need now, so that you will continue to do God’s will.”

Patient endurance is what we need now. Many of you have patient endurance as you deal with health concerns and as you deal with family problems. Life is not for the weak! Many run this race of life, alone, and not with the encouragement and comfort of the Holy Spirit or brothers and sisters in Christ. How lonely a life it is without the Holy Spirit and without the community of faith and those who ran the race before us cheering us on! Doesn’t it help to run the race with each other and to run with the empowerment of the Holy Spirit as we run the race set before us?

Hebrews 11 is the famous chapter on all the men and women who have lived by faith and accomplished many heroic deeds by faith. It was all these people of faith, in the Bible, who persevered and had the endurance to run the race. And that is the summary of their faith along their journey—perseverance and endurance. They persevered in the faith because they wanted to receive what God had promised them – the reward and prize at the end of their journey of faith. We are “surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses...” cheering us on to finish the race.

Today’s scripture lesson uses the metaphor of running the race to talk about the Christian life. The main command in our scripture for us today is found at the end of verse 1, “let us run with endurance the race that is set before us...”

The original readers of Hebrews were tempted to give up faith in Jesus and go back to their old ways of life. The world describes life sometimes as a “rat race.” But that kind of race is only for self and is draining, not fulfilling, like it is with the filling of the Holy Spirit when we run with God.

The author writes, “don’t throw away your faith in Jesus because only those who continue to believe will receive the promised reward.”

It is a message for each of us. We, too, face suffering and difficulties in this life, and we, too, may be tempted to throw away our faith in Jesus when life is difficult. We wonder, “Where is God?” and we lose sight of him even if God is there for us all the time.

So, in Chapter 12 we are given an urgent call to “run the race of faith with endurance!”

How do we do that? If you want to run with endurance, ***you’ve got to lay aside hindrances and you’ve got to keep your eyes on Jesus.***

It says, “Let us strip off every weight that slows us down especially the sin that so easily hinders our progress.” That is the first rule for training. Get rid of distractions. Get

rid of anything that will slow you down during the race that God has put before you. Sin weighs us down. It keeps us from finishing the race that God puts before us.

Distractions can take us away from the race. Opportunities can distract us. Entertainment, hobbies, career opportunities can all be good for us, but they can also be a distraction from being in the race with our brothers and sisters in Christ.

Guilt can distract us. Guilt of something that happened in the past and we stop running the race. It's like somebody who stumbled in a race. Some runners stop and think, "It's over. I've fallen and I will just give up." Let us not let the past distract us from moving forward into the future. We have to get back up and keep on going. We can't get distracted by those around us either that are booing us or cheering for us.

We need to keep our eyes fixed on Jesus and strip off the weights that slow us down so we can run with endurance the race that God has set before us.

When you run a race, you keep your eyes on the finish line. I've never seen anyone win a race who's looking at the crowd or looking behind them. A runner keeps looking forward to what is ahead and to the finish line.

When we fix our eyes on Jesus, he fills us with the Holy Spirit, and he keeps working on us. Jesus won't give up on us. He is going to run with us the whole way and encourage us to keep going no matter what. He is our coach and our cheering section at the same time so that we will have the endurance to finish the race.

If you want to enter the race and finish it you need to remember that Jesus loved you so much that he endured the cross for you and for me. You're worth it to him.

It is important for us to run the race well and to have the endurance Jesus encourages us to have.

The Olympic games always has the torch traveling from country to country and city to city until it arrives at the sight of the Olympic Games. They have many different runners that carry the torch and pass it to the next runner.

When we look at the crowd of witnesses who have gone on before us they have passed the baton to us. It's like a relay race. They've finished the race, and they are now watching and encouraging us to carry the torch of the gospel around the world. In turn, we need to be ready to pass the baton to others around us that are running the race now and in the future generations.

Look to Jesus so that you will not grow weary. Jesus ran with endurance by focusing on the joy set before him, and that is how we run with endurance too.

Run with endurance by looking to Jesus. Living by faith in Jesus is like running a marathon with a steady pace. Life is not a sprint all the way. There may be times of sprinting, but to have endurance, you need to pace yourself.

Running the race of faith involves struggle, perseverance, and endurance, but it is worth it to cross the finish line.

So, as you run, remember to lay aside hindrances and every weight, every sin, and secondly remember to fix your eyes on Jesus as you run this race.

It doesn't matter if you finish first or last. All that really matters is finishing well as you keep your eyes on Jesus and run with endurance and faithfulness.