

Sixth Sunday in Lent; Palm Sunday; Confirmation; March 24, 2024

Hebrews 12:1-3

“Run Like Jesus”

Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us get rid of every burden and the sin that so easily ensnares us, and let us run with patient endurance the race that is laid out for us. Let us keep our eyes fixed on Jesus, who is the author of our faith and the one who brings it to its goal. In view of the joy set before him, he endured the cross, disregarding its shame, and has taken his seat at the right hand of God’s throne. Carefully consider him who endured such hostility against himself from sinful people, so that you do not grow weary and lose heart.

The three verses before us begin with the word **therefore**, which always compels the question: What is this therefore there for? The previous chapter of this letter to the Hebrews is called “The Faith Hall of Fame,” a litany of Biblical giants who have gone to heaven ahead of us, but still surround us when we hear their heroic stories in Scripture. Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, and Rahab, among many other Old Testament heroes, still surround us and call out to us: “God is faithful. God is good. God is salvation.” They still surround us as we look at their lives and listen to their witness.

But then the writer reveals the one whom we must watch and hear most closely: **Let us keep our eyes fixed on Jesus.** “Fixed”: locked and focused. We keep our eyes locked on Jesus because he **is the author of our faith and the one who brings it to its goal.** You may have known Jesus was a carpenter; maybe you didn’t know is also an author. Authors produce a message, a story, and there is a story Jesus authored for you. It is a wonderful story, good news that saves. It is the story of God’s own Son taking on our human flesh and blood, conceived in perfection by the Holy Spirit, and living under the law of God in our place to keep it all for us, who were born in sin and have thoroughly violated God’s law. This story of Jesus’ holy life is your ticket to the glory of heaven; you need to perfect to get in, and you are through faith in Christ.

As Jesus rides in Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, he is about to finish the story. He is bringing it to its goal: **He endured the cross, disregarding its shame...[he] endured such hostility against himself from sinful people.** The end of Jesus’ saving story is this: he endured the cross, which was a shameful way for anyone to die, but for him was worse than that. It was hell. It was separation from his Father as he suffered for your sins and mine. It was the shame of rejection and hostility from some of the very sinful people he came to save. With that suffering and death, he reached the goal and finished the story of our salvation, the center of our Christian faith.

This is why we fix our eyes on Jesus: because of what he did. But it’s more than that; we fix our eyes on him because he did it all for us. He did it **in view of the joy set before him.** There was joy waiting for Jesus at the end of his holy life and shameful death. The joy is you and me and all believers in this world who raise our voices in love and praise to the author and finisher of our faith. It is you and I and all believers in this world who still join our voices to the Palm Sunday crowd. It is the joy of all the saints in heaven who join those praises, too, the saints who now praise him perfectly, constantly, eternally, the choir of heaven we will join one day. We and all Christians are Jesus’ joy, the reason he authored and finished the Christian faith.

In addition to being a carpenter and an author, Jesus is a runner. (He has many talents, not surprisingly.) His saving work was a race he ran, and he successfully crossed the finish line. **He has taken his seat at the right hand of God’s throne.** Have you heard that sitting is the new smoking? If you are desk jockey, you

need to listen to this: get out of your seat once in a while and pace around, or buy one of those standing desks and get off your duff. Sitting is bad for you! What a world we live in where people are concerned about sitting too much! Few people had such worries in the world of the Hebrews, who received this letter. For most people, sitting was a treat, and also a sign that their work for the day was done. You don't sit until you've done what needs doing. This is the power in the picture of Jesus taking his seat at the Father's right hand. He did what needed to be done; his work is accomplished. The race has been run and completed.

We fix our eyes on Jesus not only to see and trust his saving race, or to marvel that we are the reason he ran it, or to rejoice that his race is finished. We also fix our eyes on him also to see how we should run. The goal of the Christian race is to cross our own finish line with saving faith intact. That is our goal as we fix our eyes on Jesus: **Let us get rid of every burden and the sin that so easily ensnares us.** Good runners do not fill their pockets with rocks or lope along with untied laces. Sin is what burdens us and trips us up on our race; it hurts our saving faith in Jesus and our relationship with our loving Father. But many Christians make a mistake here. They think that to reduce the burden and snare of sin, they turn their eyes in to themselves and just try harder. But the better way to drop those burdens and snares need to look at Jesus. When your eyes are fixed on him, you will of course see the perfect example of how to live your life according to God's will and avoid sin. But even more important, you'll see your reason. You are running for the one who crossed his own finish line for you, who authored and finished your salvation. Jesus' love for you is your reason to run without sin weighing you.

Let us run with patient endurance the race that is laid out for us. What else do you see when keep your eyes on Jesus? You see how to run straight and true in the lane God has marked out for you. Actual runners will tell you: if you want to run straight you look up at something off in the distance and keep your eyes focused on it. When your eyes are up and focused on your Savior, you'll see that he kept running – through all opposition. He kept running – even with patience, during the greatest trials. He ran with patience and endurance because he knew he was running the race his Father wanted him to run. So he kept running, no matter the headwinds or obstacles. Watch him run that way, and you will too.

As he did for his own Son, God has a specific race, a lane, marked out for every Christian. In a general way, we can say our races are the same: the goal is to finish in faith, keeping God's commands along the way. But we are individuals, too, and God has a very specific track laid out for each individual Christian. He had a very special and specific race for his Son, and he does for you, too. This is also what you see when you focus on Jesus: God has plan, a lane laid out for his people. Eyes on Jesus, we run and keep running on whatever track God sets us.

Running with patient endurance might seem like a strange encouragement. For sprinters, yes. But for marathoners, no. The Christian life is often a long race that is sometimes a happy breeze, other times full of challenges. But with eyes on Jesus, we **do not grow weary and lose heart.** We keep going to the end, through all difficulty, because we remember this: after Jesus finished his race, he received joy and a seat in heaven. So will we. The joy of heaven, earned by Jesus, waits for us. And so does a seat, rest, after the race is over.

On this Sunday we see Jesus, the author of our faith, reach the beginning of the end. He comes closer and closer to the goal of closing his holy life and suffering his sacrificial death. He rides into Jerusalem for us, his eternal joy. Today we also confirm five young people in their baptismal grace, five young people about to promise that their eyes will stay on Jesus no matter what. They will promise to be in his Word, at his

Supper, seeing him in faith. God makes his promise – and it cannot be broken – the Holy Spirit will work for them through the good news in Word and sacrament so they run through the finish line, eyes on Jesus all the way, to their own rest. God keep them faithful to their promises today, and bring us all to heaven's joy and rest.

Let us keep our eyes fixed on Jesus. Let us see him cross his goal to save us; let us run like him; let us find heaven's joy in him, and rest with him. Amen.