

MINISTRY BY MAIL
Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship
www.lutheranlccf.org
Thirteenth Sunday after Trinity, September 6, 2020

✠ ✠ ✠

(Hymns found in The Lutheran Hymnal, CPH, 1941)

Hymns: 447, 247:1, 479, 293, 444:2.

Lessons: Jeremiah 23:23-29, Hebrews 12:1-13, Luke 12:1-12.

Sermon Text: Hebrews 12:1-3.

Sermon by Pastor Robert Mehlretter

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

Who are your heroes and your role models? Whom do you want to be like?

Everyone at some time in our lives has had someone we looked up to as a role model or even as a hero. We want to or wanted to model our lives after that person and be like that person.

Well, in the chapter just before our text we have some examples of role models, people who are sometimes called “heroes of faith”.

These are people like Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, and others. And because we have such examples, let’s use them as role models, look at them and

“LET US RUN WITH PERSEVERANCE THE RACE MARKED OUT FOR US”

- 1. We are surrounded by a cloud of witnesses who ran the same race**
- 2. “Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith.”**

This letter was written to Jews, “Hebrews”, who had chosen to follow Jesus, believing he was the Messiah, the Christ promised in the Old Testament. They knew the Old Testament and the people in the Old Testament, many of whom are presented in this book as people who believed in God, people who had faith in God.

Those people are called **“a great cloud of witnesses.”** And the writer of this letter now says, because we have such a cloud of witnesses ‘let’s run the race God has set before us, using them as role models.’ They are witnesses whose life, works, sufferings and death attest their faith through the pages of Scripture that they were true men of faith. They were sure of what they hoped for and certain of what they could not see. Writing by the inspiration of God, he wants them – and us – to look at Jesus, to **“fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.”**

Look at those witnesses. Use them as examples and models to **“throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us.”**

You know what a hindrance is. It is something or even someone that stands in the way and blocks our path that can prevent us from accomplishing something, from getting something done.

In the same way as anyone who runs a race today would throw aside everything that might impede them in their course; so Christians, on their race to heaven, must throw aside everything that might hinder them in their race toward eternity. Whatever weighs down our hearts or lives with earthly concerns is to be carefully avoided.

Scripture also encourages us to throw off **“the sin that so easily entangles.”** Perhaps you’ve seen pictures of how creatures in the sea or a lake get tangled in nets. That’s the picture of sin wrapping itself into our lives – and wrapping us in sin itself, so that it even gets hard to move.

We speak of ‘the devil, the world, and our sinful flesh’ as hindrances to living a God-pleasing life. But within those three words are the concept of sin. We are never free from sin and won’t be until we leave this world. But we must do everything we can, with God’s help, to disentangle ourselves from sin. The picture of sin entangling us is like that pile of fishing line that gets tangled up. Sometimes it’s almost impossible to untangle it. That’s the picture of how sin takes over our lives and sometimes we can’t even move. We sometimes don’t even recognize the web of sin we are entangled in. Satan and people of the world want to present sin as perfectly acceptable, good, and normal; and things that everyone else is doing and so, the false argument goes ‘why not be like everyone else?’

We are to throw off such hindrances and entanglements. At every turn in our lives we find sin tempting us. If it doesn’t come from outside us, it comes from within our sinful hearts.

We pray and even sing in our worship services **“Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me.”** Psalm 51:10 (KJV) That’s part of what we need to **“throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles”** us.

God urges us to run **“with perseverance the race marked out for us.”** This race requires the very strongest endurance. We must accept the appointed course, recognize the difficulties that are found on it, and prepare our hearts and minds accordingly. Like an athlete who trains for a race with the greatest care, so must we lay aside every encumbrance of this life, every weight, every burden that tends to hold us back in the appointed course. The greatest of these encumbrances is sin, our old evil nature, for this surrounds us, it clings to us and hinders the new man, in the same way that a heavy coat would be in the way of an athlete running a race.

Runners aren’t dressed in heavy clothes. An athlete cannot afford to have his gaze toward the goal drawn aside to anything except the finish line. And to run a race successfully you must be dressed appropriately. Believers are clothed with Jesus’ blood and righteousness. We can’t be burdened by the cares and attitudes of the unbelieving world and of our sinful flesh. They will only drag us down in our race to heaven.

We must rely on Jesus as the goal of our race. Keep your eye on the ball, on the finish line, or as scripture says, keep your eye on Jesus. Jesus overcame sin! He conquered it and beat death so that everyone who believes in him will receive eternal life.

Run with perseverance, fixing your eyes on Jesus. That means that you can’t just glance at the finish line of a race. A runner or a swimmer or anyone in any kind of race must keep their eyes on the goal. You can’t be casually looking around as you run the race. Along the way there are hardships and difficult choices we must make. The Christian will want to choose all the things that please God. The Christian must choose those things to be worthy of the crown of life.

We renounce sin daily and refresh our lives daily, by daily contrition and repentance. It depends on one condition: Having our eyes fixed on the leader and perfecter of faith, Jesus, who, in consideration of the joy which was set before him endured the cross, thinking nothing of the shame, and is now seated at the right hand of the throne of God.

Look at the role models we have. Not only do we have Old Testament heroes of faith, but we also have first of all Jesus Christ. He is the author and finisher of faith. The finishing, the completing takes place when Christ gives to the believer **“what we hope for and ... what we do not see.”** Hebrews 11:1 (NIV) Jesus is the captain or leader, the source and perfecter of faith. Every Christian is a contender in this race of life, this race for eternal life. The heavenly course is begun under Jesus; and under him it is completed. He is the finisher, by awarding the prize to those who are faithful unto death. Thus he is the author or the judge under whom, and by whose permission and direction, they are permitted to begin the race, and he is the finisher, the perfecter, by awarding and giving the prize at the end of the race.

Even so we Christians cannot afford to have distractions draw our steadfast gaze away from Jesus, who beckons us on toward salvation. For it was he who not only set us an example of unwavering faith, but also leads us in the paths of perfect trust in God. He who began the good work of conversion and sanctification in us will also perfect it until the day of the final revelation of glory. His example consists in this, that he willingly endured the cross, the entire burden of his suffering culminating in his crucifixion, at the same time disregarding the shame and disgrace which men were heaping upon him. During all this time Jesus kept before

him the prize, the eternal joy and bliss which would be his on the completion of his task. And he received his reward. He was, also according to his human nature, elevated to the position of honor and glory at the right hand of God. Having held this position by virtue of his divine nature from eternity, he now holds it also by virtue of his human nature. We must never lose sight of his example.

It is a race that is marked out for us. ***“Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize.”*** 1 Corinthians 9:24 (NIV) Of course, not just one person will get to heaven, but everyone who believes. But the picture is valid because it encourages each of us to strive our hardest to live as God’s beloved children.

But it isn’t our worthiness that gives us the crown of life. Yes, Holy Scripture says ***“be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life.”*** Revelation 2:10 (KJV) But that faith comes from the Word of God working in us. Scripture is plain that ***“faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.”*** Romans 10:17 (KJV)

Yes, we endure hardships and difficulties on our race toward heaven. It takes discipline, just as any athlete has learned. You can’t just put out only at game time. In every practice you must work hard, so that you have a chance to win the race, the match, the game, the contest.

As if there were any doubt about who is the best role model, we read about Jesus. He ***“endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.”*** He ***“endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.”***

He is the One ***“who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, [then] sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.”*** The joy lying before him is the glorification that followed the sufferings plus his kingship over all believers. In order to get this joy Christ paid the price of the cross with its shame. During his entire humiliation, especially when he was foretelling his suffering on the cross, Jesus pointed to his resurrection and sitting at the right hand of his Father.

When he endured the cross, this is the shame of dying the death of a criminal who was considered as accursed by God by his executioners. The shame was not a small thing, but in comparison with the joy, Christ gladly did this.

Look at what Jesus endured, ***“so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.”*** Take into consideration the one who has perseveringly endured such opposition by the sinners against himself in order that you may not grow tired by relaxing in this race! He is ***“one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are--yet was without sin.”*** Hebrews 4:15 (NIV)

In the example of Jesus we see perseverance. We are to keep our eye on the beginner and finisher of our faith. We are also to take him into consideration as the One who has persevered and endured in order that we may not grow tired and relax.

Jesus, the sinless one, should have received the highest praise from all men, who were not sinless, but he received the most terrible opposition at the hands of sinners. As he has persevered through it all, we ought to consider him now when we, who are saved from sin by him, are asked to put away the hampering sin and to show perseverance in running our race to a successful finish. What Christ did for us is to inspire us in order that we may not grow tired by relaxing or letting down on the effort.

So in this race toward eternal life, we find comfort and joy in the words of Paul to the Romans: ***“Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God. Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us. You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly”*** Romans 5:1-6 (NIV) Rejoice that Christ died for you!

Look to Christ in your daily race, for only in and through him will you win the race to heaven! Amen.