

MESSAGE – Running the Race of Faith
November 7, 2021 All Saints' Sunday
Rev. Lisa Kruse-Safford

A couple weeks ago I made a sports analogy...which while unusual for me, is not uncommon in the preaching world. The Apostle Paul used sports analogies several times.

In 1 Corinthians 9:26 Paul writes: "Therefore I do not run like someone running aimlessly; I do not fight like a boxer beating the air."

Galatians 2:2 "I wanted to be sure I was not running and had not been running my race in vain.

Galatians 5:7 "You were running a good race. Who cut in on you to keep you from obeying the truth?"

2 Timothy 4:7 "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith."

And today we hear it from the writer of Hebrews:

Hebrews 12:1-2

12 Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, ²fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

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Running....so many metaphors about running. I have a love/hate relationship with running. It's something I've always wanted to do: be a runner, but it always seems to elude me.

But the author draws attention to some aspects of the sport of running that shine light on how we live our faith:

Remove the extras....

The athletes that trained throughout the centuries before the time of Christ and after – through the Greek/Roman traditions ran their races literally without any clothes. Of course the clothes they wore: robes, and such would have presented difficulties to run in. Their legs would have gotten “entangled” around their legs and tripped them up.

That happens to us as we run the race that we call faith. we are to run without the things that can trip us up: namely sin. but let's get a little more specific:

Greed can trip us up when our faith calls us to generosity.

Selfishness can trip us up when our faith calls for self-denial

Power can trip us up when our faith calls for submission

Hatred can trip us up when our faith calls for agape

But it's not just this, it's the extra weight that we might be carrying with us. (not the weight around the middle....)

When those ancient athletes trained, they sometimes ran while carrying weights. This trained their bodies to be strong and when it came to the race, they wouldn't carry the weights of course, they would lay those down and then run much more freely.

We need to lay our weights down as well, those spiritual things that keep us from running in our faith well.

Particularly I think of shame and guilt. When we keep carrying the guilt of our sins, not leaving them at the foot of the cross, well then, how are we living the faith that is about forgiveness? And if we keep carrying the shame from our past, we cannot run to the new life that is before us.

Let's remove what we don't need to run our race....

### Run with Perseverance....

As is now, back then there were several lengths of races that athletes participated in.

The stadia – the length of the stadium (about 200 yards)

Two stadia – obviously two lengths of the stadium

Dolichos – 20 or 24 stadium lengths....

Runners would train for each of these events...obviously building up to be able to endure the dolichos run. They would have to build endurance through perseverance.

This is where I always seem to have an issue when it comes to running. I just get tired. Or my legs are telling me to stop. And at some point, instead of going out the next day and trying again, I end up giving up. I tell myself I'm not runner material, but the reality is: I could be if I didn't give up. Therefore, I don't build up endurance.

The same is true in the Christian faith....it takes perseverance. Keeping going in the faith even when times are tough.

Holding on to the belief that God is good when trouble comes.

Holding onto the faith that sins are forgiven when your mind keeps revisiting them.

Continuing to share the faith even when it is not received.

Persevering through results in becoming a runner in the faith.

### Keep focused...

Runners keep their eye on the prize: crossing the finish line. It's what keeps them taking the next step.

The same applies for the faith; when we take our eyes/focus off Jesus we lose our way and our faith is threatened.

Peter took his eyes off Jesus and began to sink.

The Galatian church was going in faith but something cut in on them and they lost focus

## Hearing the Cheers

I have a colleague who signs off his emails to me with "cheering for you"

The first time I read that I was so touched. Having someone state right there that he believed in me in the ministry and was cheering me on: "you got this" "you can do this" "keep going".

The lesson tells us that we are surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses....  
those who are cheering us on....

To keep going

To hold fast to the faith.

And on this All Saints' Sunday – may remembering their faith encourage us in ours.