

**Thirteenth Sunday after Pentecost**  
September 8, 2019  
Christ the Rock Evangelical Lutheran Church  
Farmington, New Mexico

**Hebrews 12:1-13** 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, **2** fixing 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. **3** Consider him who endured such opposition from sinners, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.

**4** In your struggle against sin, you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood.

**5** And have you completely forgotten this word of encouragement that addresses you as a father addresses his son? It says,

“My son, do not make light of the Lord’s discipline,  
and do not lose heart when he rebukes you,

**6** because the Lord disciplines the one he loves,  
and he chastens everyone he accepts as his son.”

**7** Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as his children. For what children are not disciplined by their father? **8** If you are not disciplined—and everyone undergoes discipline—then you are not legitimate, not true sons and daughters at all. **9** Moreover, we have all had human fathers who disciplined us and we respected them for it. How much more should we submit to the Father of spirits and live! **10** They disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but God disciplines us for our good, in order that we may share in his holiness. **11** No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it.

**12** Therefore, strengthen your feeble arms and weak knees. **13** “Make level paths for your feet,” so that the lame may not be disabled, but rather healed.

**“All Eyes on Jesus”**

Runners toe the starting line. Two of them are favored to win the race. Equal in ability and past performance. As she lets out a big sigh, she tries to clear her mind of all the thoughts flooding into her brain. Past failures. A lengthy list of injuries. Surgeries. Years of medical treatment and physical therapy. Fallout from a toxic relationship with her coach. Poor tactical decisions and strategies that let the lead slip away. Bad conditions at race time. Poor footing on the race course. The race is about to start, but she can’t get all those thoughts out of her mind.

The other athlete has been competing for just as long. She’s got just as much history. Plenty of ups and downs in her history. Lots of mistakes to go with the victories. It’s been a long journey just to get to this point. The training and the competitions have taken a toll physically and emotionally. But right now she’s not thinking about any of that. There’s only one thing on her mind right now is the goal. Thinking about the finish line helps her concentrate on just putting one foot in front of the other. When things get tough, she knows

she can count on all those long hours of training, all the encouragement from her coaches, all the support from her family and friends.

Hebrews chapter 12 compares the Christian life to a race. There is so much going on in life, so many thoughts running through our minds, so many things going on around us, so much getting in the way. Hebrews 12 teaches us Jesus gives us focus for life. Jesus has finished his race. Jesus will get you to the goal. We find encouragement when all eyes are on Jesus.

This chapter starts by picking up where Hebrews 11 left off: **“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.”** (Hebrews 12:1) Since we have those believers who have gone through hardships and still successfully completed their lives of faith, we can focus on what needs to be done. Hebrews tells us to discard anything unnecessary that would weigh us down and impact our performance negatively. There’s a reason why we don’t wear a runner’s uniform for our regular activities. Oh, tracksuits might be comfortable. But when athletes are ready to compete, they peel off those tracksuits and get down to the bare essentials that we would be embarrassed to wear around town. Even if they might be feeling a little self-conscious, they are focused on what needs to be done. Fashion and everything else takes a back seat. All eyes on the goal.

We can think of plenty of things that seem perfectly normal, but aren’t essential to our race of faith. They might be goals for material success or financial freedom or family stability. They might not be wrong or sinful. But they can be unnecessary, non-essential baggage for what is most important in our lives. Of course just being human means sin is an unavoidable reality in our lives. There are weaknesses the devil exploits. For some of us here today it is the realization that we have disappointed people we love. For some it’s a craving inside that would easily grab ahold of our hearts and slip into addiction before we know it. For some of us it’s just reacting uncharitably to what someone says or does, easily taking offense. For some of us it’s filtering what happens around us through the filter of selfishness that comes so naturally.

The first Olympics I can actually remember watching was the 1984 Olympics in Los Angeles. I remember how just as a big event was about to start, they would tell this biographical story about one of the key athletes. I remember learning about how Mary Decker had been dominating her middle-distance events for years. But she hadn’t yet won an Olympic medal. She could have competed in 1972 but was ruled too young. She had injuries she was recovering from in 1976. Then the 1980 Olympics in Moscow were boycotted by the U.S. team. In the years leading up to the 1984 Olympics she set 6 world records. Then the broadcast cut back to the 3,000 meters run where Mary Decker was favored to win.

But she never finished that race. On the third lap, she attempted to move past Zola Budd from Great Britain. But the two runners got tangled up and Mary tripped and fell to the track. In the post-race press conference she accused the other runner of intentionally tripping her. Even after she withdrew her accusation, she held onto the bitterness of that fall and let that failure eat away at her.

The danger of sin isn't only in the action of doing something that is insulting to God's holiness and dignity. It's not just getting wrapped up in harmful behaviors or getting stuck in disordered attitudes. The consequences of sin can be just as dangerous. And it might not even be something you've done wrong. It might be hurt heaped on you or abuse attacking you or an injustice you never deserved. And yet it sticks with you. You hold onto it. And it eats away at you. It's an impediment on your faith journey. Your eyes aren't on Jesus.

That's why God wants you to look to Jesus. Hebrews tells us what to get rid of and what to focus on: **"And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus."** (Hebrews 12:1,2) Fixing eyes on Jesus means not just looking at him. It also means looking away from all the other possible distractions, all the other things that draw our attention away from Jesus and the race of faith to which he has called us. All eyes on Jesus.

But this takes some training. Since God loves you, he disciplines. Since God is your Father, he cares about what you do and what happens to you. Since God knows what is best for you, you can line your life up under him, trusting he is doing what will work for your ultimate good. Since he is your heavenly Father he won't act randomly or show he is the boss, but do everything in your life so he can get you to the goal he has planned for you.

And to get you to his goal, God gets you to see Jesus. Jesus wasn't disciplined because he ever did anything wrong in life. He didn't make any mistakes that needed correcting. Yet through his entire life he was disciplined and trained to focus on his one goal in life. He was directed to endure the unjust life that would lead to the cross and then his throne. Hebrews says it this way: **"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."** (Hebrews 12:2) Jesus saw the torture of the cross and didn't let it intimidate him. Jesus felt the verbal abuse of the crowds and didn't let it distract him. Jesus felt the full intensity physically and emotionally of everything that merciless execution meant, but he knew that was the only way to reach his goal. For you.

See, Jesus knows your hurts because he was mistreated on the road to the cross. Jesus knows your anguish because of the excruciating pain of the nails and crown of thorns. Jesus knows your injustices perpetrated against you because as the world's only truly innocent person, he suffered the punishment deserved by the world's worst criminals. Jesus knows what it's like to carry the burden of your sin, because he took that sin on the cross and paid for it dearly with his life. Fix your eyes on Jesus because he considered all this pure joy. To do it for you.

There are some of us here today when we even hear the word race, we get tired. For some of us it is a chore just getting from the parking lot to the park shelter. For some of us, just going for a morning walk leaves us with aching feet and ankles and knees. For some of us, just watching competitors on TV leaves us winded. For the race of the Christian life, that's why we need all eyes on Jesus. Running with perseverance means being under stress or pressure and not giving up. Whether you have a handful of marathons under your belt or

you get winded pausing your show to walk over to the fridge and back, you need this focus in life.

One of the most emotional racing stories comes from the 1992 Olympics in Barcelona. Derek Redmon was a celebrated runner whose career had been frustrated by injuries. By the time of the 1992 Barcelona Olympics, he had undergone five operations, including one on his Achilles tendon less than four months before the Games began.<sup>1</sup> As the Olympics rolled around that summer, everything seemed to be coming together for Derek. He won his heat in the first round and the quarterfinal of the 400 meter run. As he settled into the blocks for the semifinals, he looked to the stands to see his father. He got a great start and was running a flawless race around the first curve. Then his high hamstring tore at 150 meters and Derek dropped to the track like he'd been shot. As he saw the stretcher-bearers coming toward him, he decided he had to finish the race. So he hobbled along the track in terrible pain. That's when his father came out of the stands, brushing by security, and helped his son finish the race to the standing ovation of the 65,000 spectators in attendance.

Your heavenly Father gets you to the goal. God doesn't show us Jesus to shame us. Like saying, 'look at what your older brother did, why can't you be more like him?' God's discipline moves us beyond distractions and past obstacles to see Jesus. All eyes on Jesus. When we see him, God trains our vision to see more than merely a role model. Jesus isn't just someone who help you make better decisions in your life or forces your children to behave better. The "author and perfecter of faith" is the founder of faith and the one who brings faith to its ultimate goal. Jesus places faith in your heart. And Jesus gives the power to faith.

That's how we understand Hebrews 12:12 "**Therefore, strengthen your feeble arms and weak knees.**" God's Word heals, keeps you fit and healthy. The longer and harder you run the race of faith, the fitter and healthier you become. Jesus even redefines the goal for your life. Jesus holds out for you his ultimate goal to give you a new concept of joy. Jesus shows you his victory over the cross and grave to give you a revised idea of success. You get to be with Jesus. You get to share in his glory. All of his trophies and all of his rewards are his gifts to you.

Two weeks ago Andrew Luck shocked the football world when he announced his retirement from professional football. He was only 29 years old and considered one of the most talented quarterbacks in the league. But for fans who were caught off guard when their Super Bowl expectations were crushed, they need to understand Andrew Luck probably had different goals for his life. Not that he didn't want to win a championship, but his personal health and wellbeing were more important. He told reporters that the string of injuries had taken their toll on him. He was mentally worn out and had checked out from football. Not because he had lost his focus for life. But because he had regained his focus on the bigger picture in life.

---

<sup>1</sup> "Finishing at any Cost." Derek Redmond. <https://www.olympic.org/derek-redmond>

All eyes on Jesus to see the bigger picture for all of life. See the prize Jesus has already won for you. See the power Jesus is pouring into your life through his Word. And realize you are never alone. You are not part of some insignificant minority. You are part of a team of elite athletes. And now they are rooting for you, supporting you, urging you across the finish line. Amen.