

2019 NL1 Summer Hebrews 11 and 12
19-08-11 9th Sunday after Pentecost Hebrews 11:1-16; 12:1-2

God's beloved people, grace and peace to you in the name of our crucified and risen Savior Jesus Christ.....Amen.....

Shortly after Teddy Roosevelt had left the presidency he toured in the eastern hemisphere and gave a speech called, "Citizenship in a Republic." One portion of the speech reads like this: It is not the critic who counts; not the [one] who points out how the strong [person] stumbles, or where the doer of deeds could have done them better. The credit belongs to the [one] who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood; who strives valiantly; who errs, who comes short again and again..., who does actually strive to do the deeds;... who spends [oneself] in a worthy cause; who at the best knows in the end the triumph of high achievement, and who at the worst, if [they] fail, at least fails while ***daring greatly***...."

An author of today, Brene' Brown, has taken up this idea in her book *Daring Greatly*, where she talks in part about how "daring greatly" involves not power and girth, but vulnerability and relational risk. She is not advocating being a pushover or a relational doormat, but being one who participates in life..., who engages others..., and expects to draw on other's strength in collaboration..., that we live and serve together in community..., as community..., for the sake of the community. That we enter the arenas of life...

We come to the end of our series on the book of Hebrews today. The preacher of the sermon draws on so many giants of the faith as the end of the sermon approaches and encourages us through them to run the race of faith and life with perseverance.

If you've ever run track or jogged, all kinds of images might be coming to mind: setting up your blocks..., waiting for the gun..., anticipating the start..., feeling the burn of your muscles as you round the last corner and hit the home stretch..., some of you may remember the crunch of cinders under your feet..., the feel of the mat or sand that you just landed on..., the weight of the shot or the flight of the discus..., the sound of that aluminum baton slapping in your hand or hitting the track and tink – tink – tink away..., leaning for the tape at the finish line.

Some races are long, others short, there are people in the stands and in the infield cheering you on, and the runner next to you – who is part competition part companion in this moment..., spurs you on..., but the real competition is inside yourself because running is at least as much mental as it is physical.

So it is with this life of faith that we live because of Jesus. He is the one who has run the race, died to it, and come out the other side. God in Christ has called, gathered, and sent every person who has ever been – all these biblical all-stars whose stories and examples of living in faith we have been reminded of today, along with folks whom you have met along the way, and maybe even generations of your relatives.

All these folks who have run and finished the earthly race are part of that great cloud of witnesses. These stories we hear and the stories we tell are meant to encourage, to challenge, to strengthen us in our running of the race – even if at times we might be jogging..., or walking..., or crawling..., or lying on our sides writhing in pain..., or on our backs too exhausted to even think about getting up.

Still that cloud of witnesses with Jesus-at-the-forefront... is there.

The preacher of Hebrews was pulling out all the stops in this sermon. The listeners were a congregation of folks who were growing tired and weary of being a church, a people of faith. Life was getting to them, Jesus had not yet come back, selfishness above service is always so appealing, and lethargy and despair were setting in.

So the preacher preaches encouragement, and chastisement, using scare tactics, and reason, and nostalgia, whatever it takes to get them to stir out of their complacency and remember what Jesus had done for them.

I heard someone telling the story of their college professor trying to get the class to participate, so she sat down on the floor in the middle of the students who were in chairs, and didn't say a thing for 5 minutes. They all sat there in uncomfortable silence until finally the professor hollered out, "engage!"...

Run the race, dare greatly! Be vulnerable enough to love those around you.

We hear this reading today calling us from despair to hope, from lethargy to action. There is so much in our world today that can weigh us down. We can forget to live as people of the resurrection because sin..., life..., despair come crashing in, some times worse than others..., and push us down..., sink us in the mire..., and demand our attention.

But you and I are people of the cross and resurrection. We are ones for whom Jesus bore the cross and shame so that as we are in the arena facing sin and death, Jesus runs with us. He is in this race with you to accompany you in all things – personal, societal, political, cultural....

So when we read and hear of another shooting, or children in detention and families being torn apart at the borders of our country and even in communities where people are living and working, we seek to shed despair and we pray... we pray until God uses those prayers to move our feet.

This week at the Churchwide Assembly in Milwaukee, WI, over 900 ELCA Lutherans gathered as our representatives and our national, public voice to worship, pray, and be the church in word and deed. Among other things over the course of the week, they voted and declared the ELCA a sanctuary denomination – that we will stand with the refugee and immigrant and advocate for the human rights of all people. And then they marched to the WI ICE headquarters in solidarity with those who are being arrested, separated and detained.

We, like they, are not of this land, we are all passing through, like Abraham and Sarah we are all strangers and aliens on this earth searching for a homeland which is the gift of the kingdom of God given to all people by our Lord Jesus Christ. You live in this graceful gift of god's presence now and look forward to the completion of the kingdom in the world to come.....

Also at the assembly this week they celebrated the 50th anniversary of the ordination of women, 40th anniversary of the ordination of the first woman of color, and the 10th anniversary of the decision to ordain people in same-gender relationships.

So while there are forces in our culture and world that might move us to despair, we of the ELCA church seek Christ and love for our neighbors. We stand with all people, as Christ has died once for all, and as Christ calls us into this race of life to run it. To dare greatly. To engage. In big and small ways, always taking comfort knowing that Christ is by our side.....

Let us pray: "O God, you have called your servants to ventures of which we cannot see the ending, by paths as yet untrodden, through perils unknown. Give us faith to go out with courage, not knowing where we go, but only that your hand is leading us and your love supporting us; through Jesus Christ our Lord." Amen.....