



MORRISON ZION EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

www.mzluth.org

March 24, 2024

Pastor James Enderle

Palm Sunday/Confirmation

First Lesson: [Zechariah 9:9-12](#)

Psalm of the Day: Psalm 24 CW

Second Lesson/Sermon Text: [Hebrews 12:1-3](#)

Gospel Lesson: [Mark 11:1-10](#)

Rethinking Religion: Rethinking Real Strength Strength to Endure

1. The _____ of faith.
2. What is _____ your race?
3. Jesus ____ the ____ for you.
4. ____ your _____ on Jesus.

Welcome to worship today at Morrison Zion Lutheran Church. We exist to glorify God. We have set out to do this by gathering around the Gospel so that we may grow in the Gospel and go to others with this Gospel.

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from Jesus Christ, our Lord:

If I were to ask you what you think of when you think of strength, what would come to mind? Maybe you would think of someone like "The Rock," someone who is really strong. Maybe you would think of other people in sports who have shown great strength. Maybe you think of someone in your life that has shown great strength.

This summer we have the Olympics coming. People show their strength and their many different talents and gifts in many different ways: shot putting and swimming. There are all sorts of different ways where people show their strength. Track and field is always interesting because when you look at the track team, they look very different. Some have strength for a short time, in a sprint, and others have strength to endure, to run long distances.

As we talk about the strength that God is speaking about to us today, on this Confirmation Sunday, He is talking to us about **strength to endure**. The writer of the Hebrews is writing in the chapter before about all these Heroes of Faith, these people who had faith throughout the Old Testament. As he speaks about them, he then encourages the people he is writing to and us about what that looks like. What does it look like to have a **strength that endures** and how can we continue in that faith?

When we think about faith, what kind of a race is it? When the writer speaks about us, he says this: ***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...*** What type of race is that? Your race of faith; is it a short one or a longer one? As we said, it's that longer one, *the marathon of faith*. Here we have our Confirmation students and you think back to the day you were confirmed or studying as a child the Christian faith, think about how long ago that might have been. Maybe it was a few years ago, maybe a while ago, maybe it feels like a lifetime ago, but our journey of faith is not this short thing. It takes endurance. It's like a marathon.

I have a picture here, if you believe it, I have run a half marathon. The first one is actually my wife and I. We were training for a marathon in the city in China we lived in, in Hangzhou. We lived along the Grand Canal. The second picture is this really crazy picture. My wife and I and then this guy, Nate King, he is at Manitowoc Lutheran High School. He is actually a member here, too. That's when we were going to run the Manitowoc Marathon, when we were still living in China. We came back here and ran the Manitowoc Half Marathon. It was kind of crazy how we were there right before we moved here. But as you train and you do that, it's not easy to run a marathon or a half marathon. I've only done halves. We call him "Crazy Nate," he has done full marathons. My wife has done full marathons. But Crazy Nate, the one in the second picture, has run 100 miles. Can you imagine that? The endurance it takes to do that.



Why is it hard to do that? Why is it hard to run a race like that, to run a marathon? It takes training. Then as you are running that race, there are also difficulties that come up. As the writer to the Hebrews says, ***let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance...*** The question then is asked; *what is hindering your race?* What are the burdens in your life, the struggles that are hurting your faith? He says the easy one is the sin that entangles. What are the things that are weighing you down, as you are running that race, the sin that says "There is no way that you can finish and the fact that you're sinful, the fact that you've done that, why should God forgive you for that sin?" It's the sin that entangles; the sin that holds us back and says "Just stop. Don't keep going." If you think about all of those sins, all of those things that the devil is putting before your eyes and he's saying "You're not worthy. Just stop running," we need to see that we need to get away from those sins that entangle but also to keep going with perseverance; to get away from those things that hold us back and everything that hinders us.

Some of that is the focus that we have and the things that have weighed us down and are distracting us and take us away from God. It might not be sins, but it might be the difficulties in your life. It might be the troubles that come your way and you might say "Well God, why would you give this thing to me in my life? How could you let this thing happen? If you love me, if you really love me, then this should be easy. I shouldn't have challenges. I shouldn't have this sickness. I shouldn't have this sadness." Those are things that can hinder us. As you run a race like that, there are many things that can hinder you, when you think about a marathon.

In China when we were running, what was kind of funny is there would be people wearing jeans. Can you imagine running a half marathon or a marathon in jeans? Why don't you do that? Why don't you wear jeans or a winter coat? It would hinder you and hold you back and cause you to struggle to finish that race. So there is that sin that holds us back and there are troubles that happen.



I'm going to show one more picture. This is after that Hangzhou Marathon. What happened was it rained. It was not the ideal circumstances. And then I got blisters on my feet about 2/3's-3/4's of the way through. It's not easy. There are things that want to hold us back and we need to cast those things off. But then there are those things that cling to us, like our sins, and we need to understand that God is going to help us through them. How does He help us through them? He says we need to focus ***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.*** The truth is that the race we run is so much different than the race that Jesus ran.

Jesus ran the race for you. We talk over and over again that what saves you is not your works. It's the work of Christ. Christ ran that race perfectly for you and for me. The Book of Hebrews is awesome because it talks about how Jesus is a brother to us and He is our High Priest and He faced every temptation that we face. Those sins and everything that confronts us, He faced as well. But how did He handle them? He handled them perfectly. He ran that race for you and for me and for all of us. So we cling to Him to know that He completed it. His race is so much different because He was perfect. How hard it would be. He says that ***set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame...*** But you think about that marathon and what He was running, with the sins of you and me and the whole world, how hard that was! But He suffered for you and for me so that we could have that forgiveness.

So it says we are to do what? We are to fix ***our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith.*** That first and the last; the "pioneer" you can think about as "author" as it also said in the old version of the NIV (New International Version). He is the start

and the end of our faith. He gives us our faith and He perfects it. So we fix our eyes on Him because our journey, our path of faith is not what saves us. It's not to dig down deeper, to run harder, to save ourselves, but to *fix our eyes on Jesus*. That's our run, because there are so many distractions. There are so many things that come into life that want to take us away. If you're running, you have to focus on where you're going, to focus on the goal. What is the goal? It's Christ and eternal life because that might feel like a marathon. If I'm not looking, what am I going to do? I'm going to stumble and fall. I have to keep focusing on Christ.

Think about training, think about a marathon, but maybe you can also think about if one of you wanted to be a professional athlete, to be in the NBA or the NFL. What level in your life are you in getting to that stage of being a professional athlete, or even think about this level in your life of knowing the job you're going to do and being a professional. You're a little ways away from that. If you're thinking about sports, you're still kind of almost in little leagues. You're not in high school yet. Then there is college and then there would be growing and training as a professional, as an NBA player or in the NFL. In that whole time, training, do you stop practicing? Do you stop learning and growing? You can't! If you want to be a professional, be the best you can in your occupation or in a sport, you have to keep learning and growing, fixing your eyes on Jesus and running that marathon.

So today, as you are confirmed, is this the end? Have you graduated? No, it's the start! We are disciples. But remember that being a follower of Christ is all about discipleship, too, being a life-long disciple. And your journey is just beginning to grow in your faith and knowledge of Christ, doing that here at church, doing that at home with your family in Bible study, joining Bible studies, coming and taking part in the Lord's Supper. What a blessing it is that God gives us all of these things. God gives us these people to encourage us, ***a great cloud of witnesses***. You have your family members, your friends, people who encourage you and to point you back to Christ. The encouragement is not to point ourselves to those witnesses, those strong believers, those with strong faith. The encouragement is to point us to Christ.

We know, just like those people in the Old Testament, we fall short. So we run with endurance. We run that race, not focused on our strength and our power but focused on Christ and what He has done for us, knowing that He completed the race. He ran the race for you, and He loves you so much that you are redeemed and forgiven. And what is at the end of that race? Eternal life with Him forever and a peace now that your sins are forgiven and that home awaits you forever. We thank God for that grace and mercy and we say "Amen," knowing this is true. Amen.

And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. [\(Philippians 4:7\)](#) Amen.