



MORRISON ZION EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

www.mzluth.org

March 24, 2024

Pastor James Enderle

Palm Sunday

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:

When you think about strength, what do you think of? Do you think of something specific, maybe a certain sport, maybe a certain person? I think as the Olympics are approaching this summer, we get to see a lot of different types of strengths. There are so many different people and different sports. There is strength to throw something really far. There is strength in wrestling. Then you see the track and field. There is strength to run really fast and then strength to run really far.

When we look at the strength that we see in our text today, there are different types of strength, but we are going to see this idea of endurance and perseverance come through over and over again. There is a lot of encouragement for us to endure and to persevere; to have that **strength to endure**. Not only that, we see the **strength** that Jesus had **to endure**. We see what He went through for us.

As we look at that **strength to endure**, I think one of the best pictures we have for our faith and the strength that God encourages us to have is to consider our faith. What is our faith more like? Not a sprint. Think about your life. Think about the challenges in your life. It's not just a sprint, a short little race, but it's a marathon. *It's a marathon of faith*. The journey is quite long and it's not so easy. We are going to have Confirmation later today and if you sitting here in the congregation think back to your Confirmation

Day, does it feel like a life time ago? It maybe feels like a marathon of faith that you've gone through in your life. We know part of being in a marathon is the training.

I'm going to show a little picture here. I didn't tell my wife I was going to share this, but these are actually two half marathons. The first one my wife and I were training for is in the city we used to live in, in Hangzhou. We used to live off this Grand Canal. Then the second one is right before a half marathon. This is before we actually lived in Wisconsin. My wife and I and Nate King, who is actually a member here (he works at Manitowoc Lutheran), ran the Manitowoc Half Marathon before we lived here in Morrison. But we were training in one picture and then preparing for that marathon.



Think about running. Think about preparing and what it takes to run. I've never run a full marathon. My wife has and maybe some other people have. My guy up there, Nate King, he actually ran 100 miles at once. That might be a little crazy. We actually call him "Crazy Nate." But if you are thinking about running, you want to run that race and you want to be prepared and you want to make sure that you can do it the best you can. So what will that look like? You want to think about all the things that are going to hinder you from running further, from stopping or from getting distracted. So think about your life and your faith, *what is hindering your race?*

This is what the writer of the Hebrews talks about. He says in Verse 1: ***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, fixing our eyes on Jesus...*** Think about all those things it talks about, that perseverance and throwing off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. Think about that.

What are things in your life that are hindering your faith? One of the easiest things is that it's so hard to focus. There are so many things to be focused on, to look at, and we get so distracted. We'll talk about this more later, but if you're running a race and you're looking around, if you're looking behind you, what are you probably going to do? You are going to trip. You are going to fall. You're going to hit something. So you have to be focused on the right thing. But what are other things that entangle or limit you?

One of the funniest things that we would see when we were running our half marathons in China was a lot of people wearing jeans. If you've seen marathons in America, have

you ever seen anyone run a half marathon wearing jeans? Why wouldn't you do that? It holds you back. It restricts you. Would you ever run a marathon with a big Parka, a big winter coat on? It's restrictive. It holds you down and it keeps you from running that race. What is it going to actually do if you're wearing a winter coat? Even if it's cold out, people run those races with short sleeves or as little bit of clothing as they can so that it doesn't hinder them.

So what hinders you in your faith, not focusing, but also sin and distractions. It says ***the sin that so easily entangles***. There are so many things that our sins try to distract us from; to distract us from Jesus and the race that is marked out for us. I think one of the things that sin really does is it tells you that you're not good enough. *"There's no way that you're going to finish this race. You're going to stumble. You're going to fall. And even if you've done some training, you're not good enough. You can't do this."* So throw off everything that hinders. How can we be focused, how can we focus on what we need to do to run that race?

The most important thing we can do, though, is we can understand what the race is really all about and who has gone before us. It talks about this ***great cloud of witnesses***, but notice it's not saying to focus on that cloud of witnesses. We see here all the struggles.



This is actually after running the Hangzhou Marathon, that first picture. There are going to be hardships in your life. This one, I actually got a blister on my foot about $\frac{3}{4}$'s of the way, maybe $\frac{1}{2}$ of the way through, and what do you want to do? You want to give up. You want to stop and say you can't do it. But we have to see that the race isn't all about us. It's about someone who has already completed the race. Even though there are hardships, there are going to be troubles, there are going to be things that we don't want to experience that are going to be harder than we expected, there is a hope and a promise and a truth that comes of knowing about who the race is really all about.

It says to fix ***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. Consider him who endured such opposition from sinners, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.*** One of the things for us to remember as we think of all the things that hinder us and the pains of our life is to understand that *Jesus ran the race for you*. It's NOT "I have to do it all on my own. Getting there is all up to me." In fact, it's like Jesus has carried you. Jesus has run the race for you.

Notice it says ***the pioneer and perfecter of faith***. The older New International Version (NIV) says the author and perfecter of our faith, but it's really either way. Either "author" or "pioneer," it means the "start," the One who gives us faith. The "perfecter" is the One who "finishes" our faith. Our faith is weak. We struggle. We are focused on all the wrong things. But God gave us Jesus, who was perfect for us. He ran that race for you. That's what Palm Sunday is really about.

He comes with might and power and He comes as this King, but He comes lowly. And ever since that time when He was shown in glory on the Mount of Transfiguration, He was set and focused on going to Jerusalem, to the cross, for you and for me. Though He would face all sorts of opposition, though people hated Him, though they arrested Him, He went on. He went on to die for you and for me. The Book of Hebrews is awesome because it talks about how Jesus is our brother, who experienced temptation like you and me, who ran that marathon and went through all the troubles and difficulties. But unlike you and me, He did not fail. He did not stumble. He was not distracted. Instead, He carries all of us. We see that He is the First and the Last, the One who gives us faith and takes us home, the One that finishes our faith.

What is that race really about? It's about bringing us somewhere. You could say it's bringing us to heaven, but it's also about that sin that separates. You could say because of our sinful nature and how we are born, we are separated from God. But we know that through Christ, what that race has done is brought us to peace with God. Jesus accomplished that so that we don't have to fear, to worry or to say "That's what I have to do. I have to come and reach God by how good I am, by how faithful I am." Instead, we can focus on Christ. He says that's what it's really about. He says to fix our eyes on Jesus.

As you struggle with faith, as you struggle in life, always *fix your eyes on Jesus*. We don't fix our eyes on the cloud of people, the cloud of witnesses, because this section of Hebrews follows that great chapter, the Heroes of Faith. There is name after name of people in the Old Testament. It talks about what they did and how they had great faith. But that's also kind of the "Sunday School" version, the basic version where we don't talk about all the bad stuff that they did. Understanding that they, like us, had struggles, but it's because they had faith and they trusted God that they were heroes of faith. In the same way as we fix our eyes on Jesus, we understand that He is the author and perfecter of faith and He gives us that strength.

Think about this marathon of faith. As we will talk about to the Confirmation students, it's easy to think "Yes, Jesus has done this, but what does it mean that I run this race?" If you think about training for a marathon, some of the most important part of it (that a lot of people say the best part of it) is the training, not the actual running of the race. It's training and doing that over and over again and getting that strength up. I think of professional athletes. If you think about the Confirmation students, where they are at in

life, maybe they want to be a professional football player or baseball player. In what stage of life and sports they are in, they would be about little league. If you want to be a professional athlete, what do you need to do? You need to commit your life to following this and practicing and practicing it. They have high school, and they have college, and then once you become a professional do you just stop? Do you stop training? Do you stop practicing? Do you stop growing? No!

Think about that for our lives. As you grow in faith, as you become a Christian through Confirmation as maybe a younger person or came to faith as an adult, our growing in faith doesn't stop there. We need to continue to fix our eyes on Jesus and grow our faith, through time in His Word and through growing and receiving the Sacraments. But as we fix our eyes on Jesus, we are strengthened and understand that this is not a one-time thing but a life-time thing; to focus on Christ because life is not easy. In that marathon, as you reach difficulties, as you stumble, as you fall, as in that Hangzhou Marathon as it rained on us, it's not easy. But fixing our eyes on Jesus and being filled with the strength that He gives us and knowing that He has completed it, what assurance do you have? You have the assurance that you have the strength to endure, not because of who YOU are but because of who Christ has made you. He has loved you and He has forgiven you. He has given you faith. And most of all, because who Christ is—He had the strength to endure everything, including death on a cross; death on a cross and pain for your sins and then rising again to show you that your sins are forgiven and that you can have a strength that endures in this life and into the next. Amen.

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