

*Let us run with endurance the race set before us, looking to Jesus... (Hebrews 12:1-2)*

I hate running. Well, I at least very much dislike it. I dislike it enough that I joked about having the verse above be something entirely different this month: *The wicked run when no one pursues!* (Proverbs 28:1). No offense to the track and cross-country runners among us (my daughters included), but that's straight from the Bible! Kidding aside, running for running's sake isn't something I've ever enjoyed. Yet, I've come to dislike it less the more that I have done it. There's probably a lesson there, somewhere, but for another day.

Throughout August, the Epistle lessons will be from the letter to the Hebrews, a wonderful piece of Scripture which points beautifully to our Lord Jesus Christ. We're going to hear one of the most well-known passages from the letter in just a couple of weeks.

*Since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted* (Hebrews 12:1-3).

Here, the author compares our Christian lives to a race (cf. 1 Corinthians 9:24; 2 Timothy 4:7). A race, obviously, involves running. That means, as the author states, it requires endurance, especially the longer that it is. Why? Because running is difficult. It takes energy, focus, and commitment. Even more, the longer you run, the more pain is involved. Shin splints, knee pain, cramps, soreness, on and on. Long-distance running is not for the faint of heart.

Neither, of course, is living as a Christian. I mean, *really* living like a Christian. Not pretending. Not claiming. But living. Paul, the apostles, the martyrs, and all faithful Christians throughout time give us a glimpse into how Jesus' words ring true. Being a Christian means denying yourself. It means taking up your cross. It can mean lack, pain, affliction, persecution, trouble, and hardship. Life isn't easy. It's even harder as a Christian. It is, after all, a long race.

So, how do we endure? Recently, I watched a BBC video on how runners can race more effectively. The scientist in the video claimed, "The problem is the way that we look at the world around us." Racing, like many areas of life, is effected by how we see our surroundings. Those who only focus on the immediate surroundings – and all the problems or pains – have a harder time. To race more effectively, then, researches found that runners who strategically fix their eyes on the goal – the finish line – can run faster, smoother, and with less pain as a result. This is exactly what the author of Hebrews is writing. How can we run with endurance? By *looking to Jesus*. When we see our precious Lord with us, just as he promised, no wrong turn, no pain, no foe can keep us from moving towards our goal. Our goal is to be with Jesus in an eternal paradise – a new creation. Yes, *this* creation is falling apart. Yes, *these* bodies are failing. Yes, there is pain *now* in following Jesus. Jesus, though, endured it all, even the cross, for us by focusing on the joy set before him – resurrection. As we follow him, then, our eyes should be fixed on our joy – Jesus! He will bring us to himself. And in him we will find rest!

-Pastor Squire

"Run the straight race through God's good grace; lift up your eyes, and seek His face. Life with its way before us lies; Christ is the path, and Christ the prize."

(“Fight the Good Fight,” LSB 664, v. 2)