

11th Sunday after Pentecost  
August 21, 2022  
“Finish strong by the power of the Gospel”  
(Hebrews 12:12-13, 22-24)  
By Rev. Ed Weber

“Grace to you and peace from God the Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, Amen.

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ, today’s text for this 11th Sunday after Pentecost picks up where we left off last Sunday at the beginning of Hebrews 12 with all eyes on Jesus.

**“2 looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.  
3 For consider Him who endured such hostility from sinners against Himself, lest you become weary and discouraged in your souls.”**

And so, we continue in today’s epistle with an exhortation to run strong in the race of faith in verse 12 and 13 of our text:

**“12 Therefore strengthen the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees,  
13 and make straight paths for your feet, so that what is lame may not be dislocated, but rather be healed.”**

“It’s not over ‘till it’s over”, is a sports phrase that teams try not to forget. You just never know when one team might relax and the other makes a 32 point second half comeback with a 2<sup>nd</sup> string QB. If you’re wondering when that happened, it was the 1993 playoff game between the Bills and the Oilers.

Yes, it’s no fun if it’s your team that has a let-down. There’s such a thing called the 24 hour rule. The losing team dwells on the bad effort for no more than a day, puts it behind them and then gets ready for the next game. It’s not so consequential in sports, however, it’s of absolute importance in the Christian the race of faith!

A believer must finish strong by keeping the faith, for there isn’t 24 hour rule or second chance! Lose the faith and one will spend an eternity suffering God’s punishment for sin with the devil and all the lost souls!

Jesus says in today's Gospel, **“Strive to enter through the narrow gate, for many, I say to you, will seek to enter and will not be able.”**

Jesus is the narrow gate and one only passes into eternal life by faith in Him. Without faith, Jesus will say, **“I tell you I do not know you, where you are from. Depart from Me, all you workers of iniquity.’ 28 There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth, when you see Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, and yourselves thrust out.”** (Luke 13:27-28)

All people including the wicked have sorrows in this life because of sin. But only the sufferings of the Christians are called a cross. Of course, Christians, because we are sinners also deserve temporal suffering and eternal damnation. But since Christians repent of their sins daily and receive Jesus' forgiveness, our suffering is no longer a punishment for sin, because the true punishment for sin is not this or that temporal misfortune, but eternal damnation.

For there is no punishment for God's children who have received the Son of God through faith! For Jesus Himself has taken their punishment and they have received His righteousness. Hear Romans 5:8-9.

**“8 But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. 9 Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him.”**

The Christians sufferings of the cross does not show God's wrath against us, but rather His love toward us. The Christian cross marks us as God's children and not illegitimate sons and daughters.

This is an important distinction that God's Word makes. He punishes the wicked, the proud, the evil doer, the unbeliever. It's retribution and God's just vengeance for rejecting His Son. Hear God's Word from Hebrews 10:

**“28 Anyone who has rejected Moses' law dies without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. 29 Of how much worse punishment, do you suppose, will he be thought worthy who has trampled the Son of God underfoot, counted the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified a common thing, and insulted the Spirit of grace? 30 For we know Him who said, “Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,” says the Lord. And again, “The Lord will judge His people.”**

The goats go away into everlasting punishment, but the sheep, the righteous by faith, go to eternal life. (Matthew 25:46).

Indeed, Jesus died for all people, but those who reject Christ's sacrifice remain in their sin and God must punish for He is just. But, there is no wrath of God against God's children for they have been justified by faith. Again, hear God's Word from Romans 8:1-2.

**“There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit. 2 For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death.”**

Today's epistle reading is about how the Christian receives strength to our “hands that hang down” and our “weary and discouraged souls” because of the bearing of the Christian cross. Through God's chastening we are made stronger as He purifies us, knocks off the weight of sin through repentance, and restores us by the power of the Gospel.

Yes, God's children are free from God's punishment, both now and eternally! Yet, in God's great love for His children, He purifies us with His chastisement. He chastises, not punishes. Chastisement leads a child of God to trust more in more in his or her Savior and despair more and more of one's own self-righteousness.

Maybe you heard the story about the marine who ran a Boston marathon to honor his three soldier buddies who died in Afghanistan. It was a tough race for Micah Herndon to finish. In fact, he crawled over the finish line, but he wouldn't give up. Whenever he felt like quitting, he would repeat the names of the three fallen soldiers. He wrote their names on his running shoes.

When our souls get discouraged because of God's chastising hand in the marathon of life, God wants us to repeat but one name - His name. **“Call upon Me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you shall glorify Me.” (Psalm 50:15)** So we said together in today's Psalm. We honor our Triune God by looking to Him alone - always!

We repeat Jesus' name, the author and finisher of our faith. He finished the race for our salvation! **“consider Him who endured such hostility from sinners against Himself, lest you become weary and discouraged in your souls.”**

To make sure that we don't ever take our eyes off of Jesus, God shows us His Fatherly love! Again, how does He do that? Our epistle reading makes it very clear. God disciplines and chastens us. Why? Because He wants us, His sons and daughters, to grow in our faith and finish strong.

**“My son, do not despise the chastening of the Lord, Nor be discouraged when you are rebuked by Him; 6 For whom the Lord loves He chastens, And scourges every son whom He receives.” 7 If you endure chastening, God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom a father does not chasten?”**

Chastening is a good thing! For if God didn't care about us, He would let us go our own way through the wide gate that leads to destruction. (Matthew 7:13). Many go through it.

The goal of God's disciplining is to make you a stronger in the faith by crucifying all passions and lusts of the flesh.

And the goal of God's disciplining is to finish the race strong and receive His kingdom that cannot be shaken! So, the last verse of our epistle reading says to us marathoners, **“Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us have grace, by which we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear. 29 For our God is a consuming fire.” (Hebrews 12:28-29)**

“The Kingdom ours remaineth”! God gives us His grace to serve Him in reverent and godly fear. Otherwise, one enters through the wide gate and faces His consuming fire without His grace.

Especially, God doesn't want this for any of His sons and daughters so He gently chastens us in our lives. We know how our human fathers and mothers correct us for our good out of love. And we are imperfect! How much greater is God's love for us who uses just the right amount of discipline at the right moment to keep us on the straight path.

**“ Furthermore, we have had human fathers who corrected us, and we paid them respect. Shall we not much more readily be in subjection to the Father of spirits and live? 10 For they indeed for a few days chastened us as seemed best to them, but He for our profit, that we may be partakers of His holiness.”**

And God does this for our profit -our eternal profit! So that we subject ourselves to Him and live – so that we become partakers of His holiness! When we repent of our self-righteousness, God gives us His righteousness! So, our reading goes on to remind us that the goal is to despair of our own righteousness and live through Christ’s righteousness!

**“11 Now no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but painful; nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.”**

God gives us the Christian cross in our lives to bear of hardships and losses that mark us as His loved ones. Remember Job when you are chastened by God.

Job was a man who **“was blameless and upright, and one who feared God and shunned evil.” (Job 1:1) says.** But God wanted Job to be even stronger in his faith. So, He allowed Satan to use his evil hand for Job’s good. Job lost animals, servants, all his children, and his health. Through God’s chastening of Job, He caused him to deeply reflect on his life and his God.

What did Job’s self-reflection reveal? As strong as he was, he needed to be purified, like us, and crucify his self-pity, self-loathing and self-righteousness.”

Why was I even born? Job asked himself. **“May the day perish on which I was born, And the night in which it was said, ‘A male child is conceived.’ 4 May that day be darkness;.... Why did I not die at birth? Why did I not perish when I came from the womb? .... Or why was I not hidden like a stillborn child, Like infants who never saw light? 17 There the wicked cease from troubling, And there the weary are at rest.” (Job 3:3-4, 16,17)**

In his despair, Job says, **“My eye will never again see good.....Have I sinned? What have I done to You, O watcher of men? Why have You set me as Your target, So that I am a burden to myself?” (Job 7:7,20)**

Why has God made me a target? What have I done? Maybe you too have asked yourself those questions. God’s chastening isn’t always directed at a specific sin.

Jesus once, **“saw a man who was blind from birth. 2 And His disciples asked Him, saying, “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?” 3 Jesus answered, “Neither this man nor his parents sinned, but that the works of God should be revealed in him.”**

Sin in general is the cause of all our physical suffering and eventual death. God allowed this man to live a large portion of his life blind. These years of chastening had humbled the man so that when he received his sight, he saw the works of God in him and gave glory to Him. He testified of his faith to the Pharisees, **“if anyone is a worshiper of God and does His will, He hears him.”**

In Job’s case, there was no specific sin that God was correcting. God was purifying him of doubt, self-pity and self-righteousness that is in our sinful flesh.

In his self-reflection and conversation with his friends Job tries to defend himself with his own self-righteousness.

**“5 “If I have walked with falsehood, Or if my foot has hastened to deceit,  
6 Let me be weighed on honest scales, That God may know my integrity.  
7 If my step has turned from the way, Or my heart walked after my eyes,  
Or if any spot adheres to my hands, 8 Then let me sow, and another eat;  
Yes, let my harvest be rooted out.” (Job 31:5-8)**

But Job wasn’t perfect and neither is anyone of us. We should never think that we don’t need any more chastening. God responded to Job in chapter 38.

**“Then the Lord answered Job out of the whirlwind, and said:  
2 “Who is this who darkens counsel By words without knowledge?  
3 Now prepare yourself like a man; I will question you, and you shall answer Me. 4 “Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth?  
Tell Me, if you have understanding. 5 Who determined its measurements?  
Surely you know! Or who stretched the line upon it?  
6 To what were its foundations fastened? Or who laid its cornerstone?”**

For three more chapters, God reveals His omnipotence and chastises Job to humble himself. So that finally Job responds.

**2 “I know that You can do everything, And that no purpose of Yours can be withheld from You. 3 You asked, ‘Who is this who hides counsel without knowledge?’ Therefore I have uttered what I did not understand, Things too wonderful for me, which I did not know. 4 Listen, please, and let me speak; You said, ‘I will question you, and you shall answer Me.’  
5 “I have heard of You by the hearing of the ear, But now my eye sees You.  
6 Therefore I abhor myself, And repent in dust and ashes.”**

So, after much chastening, chapter 42 says, **“the Lord had accepted Job. 10 And the Lord restored Job’s losses when he prayed for his friends. Indeed, the Lord gave Job twice as much as he had before.”**

Though we don’t understand God’s wisdom fully like Job, He leads us to trust in Him when He chastens us. As **Proverbs 3:5** says: **“Trust in the Lord with all your heart, And lean not on your own understanding”**

The goal of God’s disciplining is to make you stronger in your service to Him as a witness of His great deeds! God has a good plan always for all His children when we endure the many difficulties in the marathon of this life. And always, the Lord’s chastening in our lives leads us to receive His forgiveness in His Word and His Sacrament of the altar this day as the body of Christ.

**“22 But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, to an innumerable company of angels, 23 to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are registered in heaven, to God the Judge of all, to the spirits of just men made perfect, 24 to Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling that speaks better things than that of Abel.”**

Wow! In the company of God’s people, and innumerable angels, you and I come to receive the blood of Christ our Mediator who makes us perfect in His sight. He lifts up our weary souls and hanging hands and we continue our race, strengthened by His love! Amen.

**The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your heart and minds through Christ Jesus.” Amen. (Philippians 4:7)**