

SERMON

IN IT FOR THE LONG HAUL

Preaching text: John 6:56-69

This is the second Sunday Chris has played in our Praise Band. It is fun for me to see Chris and Sean both playing guitar together. That is because one day I would love to have Kurt up there playing with me. So, seeing the Walkers doing it gives me some hope.

I have been excited about the idea of Kurt playing guitar pretty much his whole life. In fact, when he was one I bought him his first full-size electric guitar. It will need to be restrung before he plays it but it's waiting for him.

That's not the way you are supposed to do it. If your kid shows an interest in an instrument, it's always a good idea to see if you can rent one before you buy. There are a lot of instruments you can buy cheap because people have started lessons or started practicing but didn't stick with it. It's better to wait to invest a lot of money until you know your kid is committed. Too often kids get disenchanted when they realize the work it will take to learn the instrument.

That is kind of what was going on in our gospel for today. As Jesus began to tell people following him was going to be difficult sometimes, many of his followers started getting disenchanted. Just before this they wanted to make him king! But it turns out they weren't in it for the long haul. So, one by one, as they sensed that he was not going to give them what they wanted, they drifted away.

Even some of his closest followers were losing their enthusiasm. John writes, "From this time many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him."

"You do not want to leave too, do you?" Jesus asked his disciples. Simon Peter answered him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We have come to believe and to know that you are the Holy One of God."

Good old Peter! Impetuous. Excitable. Sometimes speaking before he thinks. But Peter was in it for the long haul. His commitment went for beyond just when things were going his way.

Sure, Peter got discouraged from time to time. After the crucifixion, he was ready to go back to his fishing nets. That's understandable. He felt terribly let down. He had invested his whole life in this man Jesus. Now he was in a tomb. But still, Peter's commitment to Jesus never failed. He might have shown a little weakness every now and then, but he was in it for the long haul.

I think of all the kids who have gone through Sunday School at this church, all those who have been involved in youth groups. Most of them graduate from high school and disappear until they have children of their own. I watch as parents bring their children to church, but then when they move out of the house, they drift away as their children become grown. I have seen people who were involved in the church for 20-30 years, they have a disagreement with another member or the pastor, and they are never seen again.

What a treasure, what a blessing are those of you who are in it for the long haul! You have a very special kind of faith ... a faith that will be rewarded.

The truth is **life is a marathon**. Life is hard. We face lots of obstacles. Just because we are Christian doesn't mean that everything is going to go our way. We get cancer, have heart attacks, strokes, diabetes, just like everybody else. We watch family members suffer and die. We lose our jobs. It's at times like these that we need faith for the long haul. Life is not easy.

Life is a marathon. Success comes to those who are willing to hang in there when the going gets rough. **And what really matters is not how we begin this life but how we finish.**

Many of us are good at starting things. We have talent, enthusiasm ... but the problem can be sustaining that good beginning. That can be true in our relationship with Jesus, with our spouse, our children, anyone. How are we at finishing?

Finishing is what faith is all about. I am so grateful for those of you who are in it for the long haul. Some of you have been followers of Jesus all your life. You have seen pastors come and go. You've been here when the church has been in times of growth ... and times when we have struggled. Through good times and bad, you've been here!

Some of you have had your own personal stumbles. You've gone through times of grief and disappointment. Maybe you've given in to sin and you have doubted how God could possibly forgive you and accept you? But you have still hung in there.

Faith is hanging in there when everything looks dark and your options seem limited, but you know that somehow God is at work in your life. So, you stay in this place of God's grace. You are in it for the long haul. You have put yourself in God's hands. You can say with Peter, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We have come to believe and to know that you are the Holy One of God."

That is what faith is about. Life is a marathon. It's not how you start; it's how you finish. That is faith for the long haul.

AMEN.