

10th Sunday after Pentecost
August 14, 2022
“All Eyes on Jesus!” (Hebrews 12:1-3)
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 9th Sunday after Pentecost is from our Epistle reading Hebrews 12:1-3.

“Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, 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.”

Here ends our text.

As we came to church this morning, we looked into the sky and were greeted with rain clouds refreshing the earth with a much-needed watering of our dry land. It’s a beautiful sight for us to behold in the scorching heat of the month of August. God knows our needs. As Jesus said in Matthew 5:

“He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.”

Not everyone who sees this rain falling gives thanks to God, recognizes that it comes from God, and believes in God as the source of all that is needed in this life and the next.

As we heard last week in the opening verse of Hebrews 11, **“faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.”**

God-given faith looks at the clouds and sees the maker of those clouds, the universe and our very bodies and souls. God-given faith sees the reality of the life beyond this life when our earthly pilgrimage ends, as we learned from Abraham, Sarah, Isaac and Jacob last week. We look forward with these Old Testament believers to the promised fatherland of eternal life, only made possible by the

descendent of Abraham, Jesus Himself. By faith in Jesus, Abraham and all believers in the Old Testament were counted as righteous and included in the vast number of stars shining brightly in the night.

Yes, God's word reminds us to look at the stars and clouds and remember those who have already finished the race and received the victory prize of eternal life. They are Scripture witnesses for us in our spiritual race, encouraging us to not give up and not get entangled in sin.

They finished the race because they all looked unto Jesus, the author and finisher of their faith. All their eyes were on Jesus for He is the only Way to enter the one race that truly counts and also finish it. Yes, God makes His rain fall on the just and the unjust. And these Old Testament believers, like us New Testament believers endured much persecution and reproach from those who are not looking to Jesus.

God reminds us of their races because each of them had their eyes fixed on Jesus when the world around them didn't. God reminds us of the example of Moses in today's epistle reading from Hebrews 11.

“By faith Moses, when he was born, was hidden three months by his parents, because they saw he was a beautiful child; and they were not afraid of the king's command.”

By faith, Moses' parents defended their defenseless baby from the murderous command of Pharaoh. By faith, Christians today endure threats and violence against themselves for defending the unborn babies who the kings of this world give license to be killed and fight to establish this law.

Indeed, we have not only the example of Moses' parents who saved their child, but of the midwives who were commanded to kill all male babies, but let the daughters live because the Egyptians feared the growing Hebrew population. So, in Exodus 1 we read:

“When you do the duties of a midwife for the Hebrew women, and see them on the birthstools, if it is a son, then you shall kill him; but if it is a daughter, then she shall live.” 17 But the midwives feared God, and did not do as the king of Egypt commanded them, but saved the male children alive.”

The midwives feared God, believed in the one true God and risked their lives rather than sin.

Then we hear of the faith of Moses who was taught the faith as a child. His race of faith could have faltered by following the Egyptian gods and the life of luxury that he was offered. But Scripture says,

“24 By faith Moses, when he became of age, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh’s daughter, 25 choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin, 26 esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt; for he looked to the reward.”

Moses looked to Christ. He looked to the great reward of eternal life that only Christ can offer. By faith he stood with the people of God and called himself a believer with them.

So too, Christian believer, you are called to bear the reproach of Christ in your daily race as you show forth your faith in Jesus. You belong with the people of God. As we studied in Bible class last Sunday, the 3rd commandment “Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy” calls on believers to gladly hear the word of God and not forsake coming to church as is the habit of some.

So we hear these words from Hebrews 10.

“And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, 25 not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching.”

What is important to you, the hearing of God’s word, is seen by others, your children, your neighbors, the word around you. And it is important to you to not only come to God’s house and receive strengthening in Word and Sacrament, but also to exhort one another. By faith, your voice is an exhorting voice that calls weak Christians to look to Jesus as the Author and Finisher of the faith. For the day is approaching when our race ends! You don’t want to lose focus and leave the race and lose the prize.

So our text reminds us, **“let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us”**.

Our sinful flesh entangles, trips us up. When we take our eyes off Jesus, we falter. When Peter looked at Jesus, he could walk on the water. The moment he took his eyes off of Jesus, he began to sink in the waves. Our sight can easily be filled with sinful sights, distracting sights of this world instead of Jesus. So Paul says in Romans 7:

“For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells; for to will is present with me, but how to perform what is good I do not find. 19 For the good that I will to do, I do not do; but the evil I will not to do, that I practice... 24 O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? 25 I thank God—through Jesus Christ our Lord!”

Eyes on Jesus. He reached down and lifted up Peter. Jesus reaches down and lifts you up with His word of forgiveness and His very body and blood given and shed for you.

So, we again hear from God’s word how Moses believed and was saved by the sprinkling of blood on the doorpost.

“27 By faith he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king; for he endured as seeing Him who is invisible. 28 By faith he kept the Passover and the sprinkling of blood, lest he who destroyed the firstborn should touch them.”

By faith, the Passover Lamb, Jesus, saves us from eternal death by His blood shed on the cross.

“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.”

None of the Old Testament believers were perfect and without fault. Neither are we. But they looked to the faultless One, forshadowed as the Passover Lamb, who ran the race perfectly for them and completed it for them. Christ’s prize is theirs and our prize. Christ’s victory is theirs and our victory.

In your spiritual race, you don't have to put on jogging shoes. You don't have to do a triathlon or a cross country race. You don't have to climb Mt. Everest. Jesus already climbed Mt. Calvary. He has put on you the robe of righteousness through your baptism. He graciously began Your race and put you in the starting blocks in your baptism.

Now, you look to the clouds...to the One who ascended through the clouds and is ascended at the right of the Father in glory. All eyes on Jesus as you run the race of endurance through the power of the Word of God and Sacraments.

When life is difficult, remember how Jesus the cloud by day and the pillar of fire guided the Israelites through the wilderness. He will guide you through the valley of the shadow of death with His rod and staff.

29 By faith the Israelites passed through the Red Sea as by dry land, whereas the Egyptians, attempting to do so, were drowned.

And by faith, you too will see how God gives you safe passage through the trials and tests of this life. We daily put off the weight of sin that drags us down by repentance and look to Jesus who forgives us richly.

Trainers sometimes put blinkers on horses so that they are not distracted and run straight to the finish line. So too, we look to Jesus with the cloud of witnesses before us and run the race set before us until we reach our heavenly prize. So we heard from Colossians a few weeks ago.

If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. 2 Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth. 3 For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. 4 When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory. (Colossians 3:1-4)

All eyes on Jesus! Amen.

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