

Palm Sunday
Hebrews 12:1-3
March 28, 2010

“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.”

No one can hear this sentence with an ounce of attention and not catch some sense of the devotion, dedication, determination and effort involved here.

It's a race, a long race. Perseverance needs to be here. A need for ridding ourselves of everything that might trip us up or slow us down is called for.

This race is a picture of our personal, individual, Christian faith and life.

Before we go any further, think about yourself, about your faith in Jesus Christ, about your way of life. Does it resemble this sentence – “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”?

The race the Father marked out for Jesus was far more difficult than the race He has marked out for anyone else. The God-given mission for Jesus was our deliverance from all evil, all sin, all guilt, all death, from Satan's plans and intentions against us, from every consequence of sin, including the rightful eternal consequences. And the word 'our' in “our deliverance from” includes all humanity, every individual for all time. That was the race God the Father marked out for His Son. It's the race Jesus entered willingly.

God the Father sent His one and only, His Son, into the world to run this race. Jesus was obeying already with His birth, throughout His childhood, for all His life. He would obey to the point of giving Himself, His life, in death on the cross.

At one famous marathon course, right at the end of that long, grueling race, is what is called 'heartbreak hill.' For Jesus, at the very end of His earthly course, was the mother of all heartbreak hills, the most grueling of all.

On that first Palm Sunday that is the part of His race Jesus was coming to and He knew it.

There was the whole world of all of history, for all time, in need of redemption and forgiveness. Everything in need of forgiveness, all the sin, added to by every single person, by each one of us, too, Jesus had taken upon Himself, to suffer for, to die for. This was His life's work.

And Jesus loved His work, as excruciatingly difficult as it was. He loved His work because He so loved His Father who sent Him to do this work and He so loved all sinners, all of us, He'd come to rescue.

You know how many, even as Jesus did this work, did NOT appreciate that Jesus was doing it. Some even hated Him and wanted to kill Him. They didn't know that even their hatred against Jesus was part of our Savior's course marked out for Him.

For added motivation, Jesus also looked beyond the present agony of His race. He looked to the finish of it. The goal was victory over sin, guilt, death, satan and hell. It was a victory He aimed to share with all of us sinners. He looked forward to resurrection, new living, to eternal life, to the enjoyment of the eternal glory He'd enjoyed before He came in humanity to win our salvation.

It was the joy of salvation from disobedience and punishment for all the disobedient, all sinners, all people. It was the joy of "seeing" some, in fact, many people actually rescued from this present evil age by faith in Him.

In the previous chapter, chapter 11, is a great list of Old Testament believers in the promised Savior, who completed their race in glory. They only further encourage us today, running our race in the age of fulfillment, after that promised Redeemer, the LORD God Himself, but in the flesh, has come and completed His work, finished His course.

Jesus anticipated His renewed heavenly rule over all His people by grace, through their faith in His forgiveness for them.

And here is where we plug into this. God has marked out a race for each of us followers of Jesus, as well. Each course is unique to each believer. For some it is longer than for others. Some live longer in this world than do others.

Some parts of the race course God had wisely marked out for each believer are easy, even pleasant, like a marathon course through beautiful countryside. I'm sure each of us can tell about such times. But, placed into each believer's life's course will be those heart-break hills, some harder or easier, longer or shorter than others.

During hard times, we are tempted to quit the faith. We fail to appreciate the strength and energy our Lord had provided us in our Baptism, in the written Gospel, in the Holy Supper. But exactly when the going gets really hard is when we need to avail ourselves of Christ's Holy Gospel. No fuel, no water, no finish! Do Not cut yourself off from God's Word!

Every cross in our lives aims to help us to despair of our own strength so that we will hold more tightly to our Lord Jesus. He started our faith through His Good News and with His Gospel; He is able to perfect, to finish it. Every trouble reminds us and even encourages us to fix our eyes on Jesus, waiting for us with open arms at the finish line. Every persecution because of our faith in our Redeemer promoted by the devil, and

executed by unbelievers, only assures us of our connection to Jesus. If we suffer with Him, as the Apostle Paul puts it, we will also share in His glory. (Rom 8)

For now, we see Jesus' ascension only from the perspective of this world, almost as if Jesus were parting from us – which it most assuredly is NOT! But one day every Christian, every person who died trusting in Jesus and His blessings, will experience his or her own glorious, joyous, exciting, eternal entrance into the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit's throne room. Keep this joy in front of you.

Do not give up the faith! Keep going in your life in Christ! Relying on Jesus and His Holy Word, you are on the road to glory! Keep that joy in front of you! Amen.