Springfield Presbyterian Church

February 14th, 2021

Sixth Sunday After Epiphany

A Faith Filled Marathon

1. Reading

Our reading this morning invites us to consider the life of faith as a race to be run and at the end of our days, seeking to win by being part of the Kingdom of Heaven. It may be no surprise to you, but I’m not a runner – yet, the runners mindset is one that we can all incorporate into our lives to help us endure our questions of faith as the days go on.

 I was speaking with a friend who is a marathon runner and she said to me, “If the runner goes onto the track and thinks they are going to lose, what is going to happen?” And I said, “They will lose.” And she said, “What about the runner who believes they are going to win?” I replied, “They might not win, but they have a pretty good chance of getting there.” We can implement this kind of mindset in our life of faith as well as in our regular day to day lives as we try to accomplish things and move forward. If we start the day out thinking it is a bad day, we won’t be able to do x or y, or we shrug our shoulders and give up – chances are that we will be unsuccessful. If we say, today is going to be a good day, we will work through our list, and we’re going to make it through – chances are that - sure, we might not be completely successful, but we stand pretty good odds that we’ll have a good day.

The same is true for this journey we are on, if we think, “I can’t be a good Christian because I haven’t read the whole Bible, or I’m not good at praying, or I just don’t understand this verse or that one.” Chances are, again, that we are setting ourselves up for disappointment. Yet God doesn’t call us to memorizing the whole Bible or being the perfect Christian, whatever that may be. But if we enter into this space of faith, and we say, “I’m learning as I go along and I’m open to learning, I’m further along than I was before, and I trust that God will lead me to where I need to go.” This mindset doesn’t mean you will be successful all the time, but that openness, that desire to learn more and to look at this life as a journey of growth, in both good and bad times, will serve us better as we run the race.

1. One Step at a Time

One of the challenges I have in this life, not only in my faith, is that I can dream big and become overwhelmed quickly. I usually have to do a ‘brain dump’ to get all my tasks and thoughts down on paper before I can see what my real priorities are for the day. And then, on my best days, I’m able to sit down and make a plan and give myself sub-tasks to focus on to complete my goals.

 Some folks are better at this than others, especially the organized ones amongst us, but it’s likely you’ve been overwhelmed somewhere along the way. Building on our faith is one step at a time, in fact, it sometimes feels like two steps backwards and one forwards. Sometimes we might feel like faith looks like we just walked around in a big circle and ended up right back where we were before. Yet, when we remember that this run, this long endurance run is one that requires a steady and sure pace, we need to remember collectively that it is a step at a time. Sometimes our growth will be easy to see and sometimes it will not, but step by step, committing your life to Christ and seeking God’s will through the Spirit will set us up for movement in the right direction.

1. The Lull

In the marathon race, there’s some point where the run becomes too much and you ‘hit’ the wall. Folks who run say that is around mile 20 – where your glycemic energy runs low and the physical, emotional, and mental battle of getting past that wall feels formidable. We know that marathon runs are 26 miles, so if we think about mile 20 – we know that we are so close, so close to that end, but it seems insurmountable.

 In faith, there’s going to be walls. There might be plenty. How will you keep your faith when the wall of grief or illness comes, when tragedy strikes, or when you just feel like you are in a lull? It might be time to run to the sideline and get some water – it might be time to phone a friend in your faith community and share that you’ve hit this wall. Maybe you need to yell, cry, or dwell in grief – and in those places, while you may have felt like you’ve fallen out of the race, you are still running and still growing – it just doesn’t feel like it. To push beyond the wall requires us to reach out, to dig deep, to speak truth and have a good shouting match with God. If we want our faith to be authentic and meaningful, then we need to hit the wall and be determined to find a way to surpass it. And, as the saying goes, when it comes to the wall, to these challenges – you can’t go around it, or under it, or over it, you have to go through it. That endurance and tenacity to say that you will get through it will make all the difference.

1. At the end

At the end of our days, I hope we can say we ran the race with perseverance, that we

sought God and fought to keep our faith alive even when the darkness felt like it overshadowed us. I pray that we are wise enough to know that a wall is not a wall forever and that there is hope. I pray that we deeply know that God is working with us and through us even when we do not think we are growing. At the end of our days, that’s the run we want to win, that’s where coming across the finish line has made all of this work of faith completely worth it.

1. Life in Metaphor

We’ve run with this metaphor in our reading today and in hearing this sermon, so let’s

continue to use this as a way to grow. What is your mindset today, what has it been lately, and are there ways in which you want to change it? Where are you on the mile marker? Do you feel like you’ve just started, you’re somewhere halfway, or you feel like you’ve really come to a deep understanding of faith? What are the walls you’ve hit in your life and how have you persevered through them? Are there walls that you see that could come up and how you might prepare yourself for those challenges?

 One of my tasks this week, that I will keep as priority, is making sure that you receive these questions so that you might be able to journal upon them or talk with your family or friends about how you would answer.

 There’s much to consider, even within these three verses of Scripture. I pray that we are able to explore our lives more deeply through this passage and be firmer in our faith. May you know that as you journey and run this race, that the God of all compassion and love surrounds you, upholds you, and fortifies you as you steadily run to the finish line. Amen.