

9am & 10:30am Worship
August 29, 20100
Title: Our Amazing Race

Rev. Donald W. Hackett, D.Min.
Text: Ephesians 6:11-20
First Presbyterian Church, Lancaster, PA

Introduction

- **This week I watched a few episodes of the television show, “The Amazing Race.”**
- Pairs of people race against other teams of two around the globe
- to follow clues
- and accomplish a variety of tasks to be the first to arrive at designated pit stops.
- Each week the first team is rewarded and the last team is eliminated or put at a disadvantage the next week.
- The race is exciting, hard, exhausting, at times confusing,
- and the contestants are pushed to their limits.
- When they get down to the final three teams,
- they compete for a one million dollar grand prize.

Sound familiar? You and I run an even more important race each week, the race of life. It can be good. It certainly is hard at times. If we run wisely, we can bless many people and accomplish the good work you and I were created to do. Please know that Jesus wants you and me to be completely equipped and prepared for our race. This letter from Paul is one of the ways he prepares us.

Background

Today we are wrapping up our study of one of the most profound books of the Bible. Paul’s letter addressed to the church in Ephesus is a finely crafted gem. Paul writes this letter from his prison cell in Rome around 60AD. He is nearing the end of his life. Paul has run hard and well. He has poured out his life planting communities of Jesus Christ all around the known world. In this letter he is compiling the core truths that shape us as the people of God. Paul has helped us re-think what it means for us to be the church. Now at the end of this letter, Paul is sending us out to serve a troubled world.

As we listen to Paul’s parting words, imagine yourselves about to run the race of your life. This is not a local 5K or Cross Country meet. This is a life or death marathon. There are many dangers and traps along the way. It may last weeks or you

may be running for years until you reach the finish line. For those who keep their eyes on the prize, there is great reward for those who finish strong.

The Text: Ephesians 6:10-20

- **And that about wraps it up.** God is strong, and he wants you strong. So take everything the Master has set out for you, well-made weapons of the best materials. And put them to use so you will be able to stand up to everything the Devil throws your way.
- **This is no afternoon athletic contest** that we'll walk away from and forget about in a couple of hours. This is for keeps, a life-or-death fight to the finish against the Devil and all his angels.
- **Be prepared.** You're up against far more than you can handle on your own. Take all the help you can get, every weapon God has issued, so that when it's all over but the shouting you'll still be on your feet.
- **Truth, righteousness, peace, faith, and salvation** are more than words. Learn how to apply them. You'll need them throughout your life.
- **God's Word is an indispensable weapon.** In the same way, prayer is essential in this ongoing warfare. Pray hard and long.
- **Pray for your brothers and sisters.** Keep your eyes open. Keep each other's spirits up so that no one falls behind or drops out.
- **And don't forget to pray for me.** Pray that I'll know what to say and have the courage to say it at the right time, telling the mystery to one and all, the Message that I, jailbird preacher that I am, am responsible for getting out.

Let us go back and pull out some key concepts that will serve us in our race.

1. We are in a race of and for our very lives. Most people will agree that life is a journey. We have a beginning at birth and an end at death. Some believe that this life is all one has, so spend it any way you want. You can waste it if you want, rather, live it selfishly - many would say, "go ahead." As followers of Jesus, we believe and live differently:

- We know that long before the beginning of time, God had us in mind (Eph. 1).
- We believe we each have important and necessary work to do on earth (Eph 2).

- Our lives have purpose and a destiny and are a threat to all those opposed to God and his loving purposes.

2. The enemy wants us to fail. This is not a sermon about the Devil. This is a sober assessment about the world we all live in. Evil and its effects are all around us. Evil is anything or anyone opposed to the loving purposes of God. We see the effects of evil all around us and even in us...wars, terrorists, global slavery, oppression and abuse of women, international child prostitution, drugs, crime. Did I mention hunger, disease, poverty, domestic violence, worker exploitation, and environmental destruction? There are real and spiritual powers and authorities that operate in opposition to God. Evil can express itself through individuals bent on greed and destruction, in an industry like pornography, or in a government gone bad that murders thousands of its own citizens. Whether you embrace the belief of a hierarchy of spiritual forces (the Devil, Satan, and ranks of demons) or not, know that you are a target. Jesus and the Bible are clear on this.

3. God is for us and with us.

We do not live in a safe zone free of harm. Read the newspaper or turn on the television. We live on a dangerous planet which groans under evil's control. The good news, the message for all to know is that Jesus is on a rescue mission:

- He is intent on winning us back.
- Jesus is committed to free us from the death grip of evil and to bring us home. Our trials and temptations are many, but we are not alone.
- Jesus promises to be with you and me in every situation. In times of grief, Jesus is there. When we need wisdom, the Holy Spirit, the Bible, and the community of faith are there to help us. When we are being tempted, Jesus is there to provide a way out.

4. The prize is God and the best is yet to come.

Together we affirm that this life is not all there is. God has much more for us. We are destined to join God fully in the next life as his beloved sons and daughters. We will serve God in wonderful and exciting ways in his kingdom of love, joy, beauty, justice, and grace. This life is the prelude, the preface of God's adventure for each one of us (Eph. 1). We have had to say goodbye to three dear friends this week: Mattie Greiner at 103, Bruce Ryder 87, and Dick Kuhnert at 67. These are three great people who lived this life well according to the grace given them. They are now graduated. They

have finished well and now are on to bigger and better things. As scripture reminds us *"No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him"* (Isaiah 64: 4, 1Corinthians 2:9). We know in Jesus Christ, the best is yet to come.

Conclusion

So what do we do? For us who are still running the race, how do we finish strong?

- **Get moving** – It is easy to slow down and even stop. We forget that God still has important work for you and I to do. The Bible does not talk about vacations or retirement from the life of faith. We are to awake each day and commit ourselves again to love and serve God.
 - **As you dress in the morning, may that be your act of commitment.**
- **Be prepared** – We do not go and serve unprepared. We take time to listen and reflect on the Bible individually and in community so we will have the wisdom we need for each situation.
 - **Spiritual Formation for children, youth and adults this year.**
- **Run long and hard** – We are in this for the long term. We give God what we have in terms of time, talent, and resources and then watch God multiply it beyond our wildest dreams.
 - **We give often and generously in this church for we know God is at work and wants to use us in that work.**
- **Be strong** – Following Jesus will take everything you have. You will give up your time, convenience and comfort to serve others.
 - Some days we may not feel like serving our spouse and children, helping our neighbor, or visiting that lonely person, but we do because **we are committed to do the right things in the right way even when we do not feel like it.**
- **Expect hardships, rely on God** – When you decide to follow Jesus, life in many ways gets harder. You seem to be swimming upstream. Our culture tells us to take it easy, cut corners, and to think only about yourself. Jesus says, “take up your cross and follow me.”

- **We will make it. We will persevere through broken promises, hard circumstances, and even attacks because Jesus is with us.**

- **Work together** – Notice that all these pictures have two people. We need each other to finish the race strong. We were made to live and thrive in communities that listen to God and serve the world.
 - **Find your community on Sunday, in your immediate world, and with those you can talk with regularly.**

- **Watch God work** – The greatest part of all this is that God is at work to will and do His good work in and through us. We pray, move out on what God is showing us, and then we watch God do only what God can do. Can you or I heal a person? No, but we can come alongside others, listen, pray, tap the resources that are around us and see what God will do. Let's get moving.