

# *Ascension Lutheran Church*

*Pastor Godkin's Sermon for the week of August 9, 2009*

## Cast Off the Extra Baggage (Hebrews 12:1-2)

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen. Our text is from the:

“<sup>1</sup>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. <sup>2</sup>Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and Perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.”

This is the text.

Dear sisters and brothers in Christ, Our life in the Lord has many facets. The Bible compares it to many things. We are the sheep of His pasture; we are soldiers of the cross; we are pilgrims travelling through this world to our heavenly home. And on the way we find many dangers, toils, and snares. In a way our life in Christ is like a race too. In His second epistle to the Corinthians St. Paul compares Christians to athletes. He says, “Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize. Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last; but we do it to get a crown that will last forever” (2 Cor. 9:24-25).

Olympic athletes train for years so they can be as absolutely fit as possible. They count their calories; they even weigh their food to be at their ideal weight. They use the lightest shoes, the lightest equipment. They monitor their performance with high tech computers. They do all this so they can run the race as fit as possible.

Just this past month in the world famous bicycle race the Tour de France the riders raced through the Alps and Pyrenees mountains, over some of the toughest climbs in the world in the blazing heat going about 100 miles a day.

One of the racers named Brad Wiggins had been a successful bicycle racer for years on the track, which are purely flat races. But he had always had difficulty climbing the big mountains. And yet this year he placed fourth in the gruelling bike race. Some people doubted that he could climb that fast without using performance enhancing drugs. But he said his newfound speed up the mountains was not due to drugs. Rather, it was due to the fact that he lost 15 pounds of excess weight. This meant his load was 15 pounds lighter to carry up the climbs. The result was he was much less hindered in the race when the hills came.

Our text says, “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 would run an Olympic tryout in a heavy coat with big winter boots. And an athlete would never race with a backpack full of rocks. Athletes typically want to shed every ounce of excess

baggage. They use the lightest bikes, the lightest shoes, and so on because they know that anything extra will be a hindrance for the race.

Our text tells us much the same thing. We are told to throw off anything that weighs us down, that keeps us from running the race of life freely and in the joy that our Lord wants for us. This primarily is sin. It entangles us and so often creeps into our hidden thoughts. It can then begin to saturate our attitudes and actions. For example, if we have a misunderstanding with someone and things are left so that we are not reconciled with that person, we may start to feel bitter toward him. If we feed that grudge that bitterness can start to grow and encompass a bigger part of our life. This is excess baggage that we don't need. When we take a flight and we have an extra bag to check at the airport, there is an additional cost. God does not want us to pay the cost of spiritual baggage. He does not want any residual bitter feelings to eat us up and corrode our soul. Jesus came to take that baggage and give us a clear conscience and change us from the inside out.

Some religions such as the Occult or Wicca teach its members to minimize their conscience and sense of guilt in order to maximize their sense of pleasure. Essentially, they view God's Law that is written on the heart as a burden that hinders their enjoyment of sin. In our life though we do not practise such a brazenly demonic religion we do have this same tendency to see the Law as a nuisance.

But actually the opposite is true. God's Laws are pure and good and holy. If the world kept the Ten Commandments there would be no wars and life would be a wonderful place of peace and good will and love. The burden is not God and His Laws. Rather, the burden is the sin that lives inside us. This is the burden that Jesus came to remove and take upon Himself when He went to the cross. He took the burden to set us free from sin's power.

How sin so easily entangles...one lie leads to another and another; it's a tangled web. Gossip spreads and entangles others in the sin. This is what gossip is like: Suppose a person went up on a rooftop with a feather pillow and ripped a hole in that pillow and let the feathers fly out everywhere. It would then be impossible to put the feathers back into the pillow. In the same way once gossip starts it spreads and the damage is done. Gossip bears false witness against neighbours and it ruins reputations.

Friends, what hindrances keep you from steady progress in your faith-walk? Why not ask your Coach to show you any entanglements He would like to free you from right now? As David prayed in Psalm 139, "Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting". For He is our Heavenly Father and He has our best interests at heart.

He is so very gracious and He gives us a place to unload these burdens and cares. He does not want us to carry around this guilt and shame like we were carrying a fridge on our back up Mount Royal. He welcomes us to cast all our concerns and cares, all our sins and guilts, and all our frustrations onto the cross of Jesus our Saviour. As our text

says, "Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the Author and Perfector of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God."

The cross is where Jesus atoned for our sins and won the victory for us. Our text this morning tells us to "run with perseverance the race marked out for us". It is not an easy race. It is full of snares and trials along the way. Like any hard race it involves moments of suffering when we may even feel like giving up. This race is the ultimate endurance test. The only way to win this race is to constantly throw off our sins and the things that hinder us. This happens everyday when the Holy Spirit convicts us through the Law and leads us to confess our sins and leave them at the cross where Jesus paid for them once and for all.

What keeps us persevering and looking up to Jesus is the assurance of His love; that no matter how bad things may get He has promised to be with us always to the very end of the age.

No athlete can compete without a good diet and proper training. There are what I like to call spiritual calories. Some calories are spiritual junk food. We want be careful about the amount of spiritual calories we get from TV and entertainment and so on. Jesus says in Matthew 6:22, "The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eyes are good, your whole body will be full of light." Indeed, to see Jesus is life and love and light itself. He lights the way. He is our home and stay.

Perhaps you have heard of the books, Chicken Soup for the Soul. As Christians, the chicken soup for our soul is Jesus Himself. He is the Bread of Life. He gives Himself to us to chew and digest through His precious Word and Sacraments. The more we can saturate ourselves with Him the healthier we will be to persevere in the race marked out for us. And so the way to keep our eyes fixed on Jesus is to get His Word in us! We can read it! We can hear it! We can study it! We can talk about it! And we can sing it! What a blessing and what a joy!

Indeed this journey, this pilgrim walk of God's people is not easy. But we have a rich, glorious prize. We have salvation and a relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ and He gives eternal life in His Kingdom. When we have our eyes on Him He gives victory in this race of life and He gives a crown of glory that will last forever. And as it says in the hymn, Jesus Thy Head once Crowned with Thorns, "To us Thy cross is life and health; Twas shame and death to Thee; Our present glory, joy and wealth, our everlasting stay." Amen. The peace of God that surpasses all understanding keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.