

A Service for Sunday 8th August 2021

Running with perseverance the race

1. **Call to worship** I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. (2 Tim 4:7)

Hymn StF 634 Fight the good fight with all your might ;
Christ is your strength, and Christ your right ;
lay hold on life, and it shall be
your joy and crown eternally.

Run the straight race through God's good grace,
lift up your eyes, and seek his face ;
life with its way before you lies ;
Christ is the path, and Christ the prize.

Cast care aside ; upon your guide
lean, and his mercy will provide ;
lean, and the trusting soul shall prove
Christ is its life, and Christ its love.

Faint not nor fear, his arm is near ;
he changes not, and you are dear ;
only believe, and prove it true
that Christ is all in all to you.

John Samuel Bewley Monsell

Prayer Father we have been impressed by the athleticism of the competitors in Japan. You call us to run the race of life, not speed, but perseverance, not powerful, but humbly, not on our own, but with You and brothers and sisters in Christ alongside to encourage us to keep going and being fruitful. Forgive us when we don't try, when we give up, when we ignore your encouragement. Amen

Reading Hebrews 11: 39 – 12:3 Run with perseverance

Reflection

The 2021 Olympics in Tokyo draw to a close this weekend. At the time of writing Team GB have 14 gold medals and are 5th in the Medals table. In Hebrews, the writer uses the race analogy to encourage perseverance. *And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us* 12¹. The context a huge list of people of faith who are in heaven and cheering us on in our race – “A great cloud of witnesses.” Some of the athletes in Tokyo have spoken of the lack of crowds to cheer them on and how they miss the inspiration and encouragement that gives. We may ourselves in the race of our Christian life, feel as though there are no crowds cheering us on, but all those who have had an influence of our Christian Commitment, parents, Sunday school teachers, fellow Christians, evangelists etc are amongst the cloud of witness encouraging our race to continue that we might finish.

Paul often refers to being in a race. To the Corinthians 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* 1 Cor 9²⁴. Listening to commentators and coaches from Tokyo, about the success of our athletes, they talk about years of training and hard work to prepare for their races. They have set their minds on winning, it's not just the physical body that needs fitness training, but the mind, psychological preparation. Coaches and psychologists will seek to build self belief in their athletes and to have a mindset of winning not failing. But as Paul indicates, only one can win. In the Olympics at least the first 3 get medals. But Paul also says *“However, I consider my life worth nothing to me; my only aim is to **finish the race** and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me”*. That doesn't depend on how others are doing – others may be stronger, better, more gifted, faster. Paul wanted to complete his God given task which he says is *“the task of testifying to the good news of God's grace”*. At the time Paul was on his way to Jerusalem where he knew prison and hardships were facing him. His aim is to “finish the race.”

Paul writing to the Galatians was also aware of those who were pressurising the new Gentile believers to accept some parts of the Jewish law and rituals: laws about food and about circumcision. In chapter 5⁷ he says: *You were running a good race. Who cut in on you to keep you from obeying the truth?*

The Galatians were running a good race but they were being burdened by zealous Jewish Christians I ask myself the question, am I doing or saying things that are imposing my ways of doing and being a Christian on others. I long for people to know Christ and be in a relationship with him, but my task as

Paul's is "the task of testifying to the good news of God's grace" And God's grace can't be boxed up into a package that is a Paul's package, or an Apollo package or a Jewish package or even a Sankey Package. Christ has set us free- says Paul

The writer to the Hebrews says "let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles ... fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith". What is important is that we are in a right relationship with God and ensure our thoughts and attitudes reflect those of Christ

For your reflection.

- 1) Remember those who have encouraged you, on your commitment to God. They would want to encourage you to continue your race. They will be amongst the cloud of witnesses in heaven encouraging you on! Jesus himself is also encouraging you on – he knows you by name
- 2) Other Christians may be stronger, better, faster than me, but what is my God given task? Whom has Christ called me to love, to serve, to share my faith with? Dwight Moody had 100 people on his personal list. In his life 97 came to faith, the final three made a commitment at his funeral service.
- 3) In Galatia some Jewish Christians wanted Gentiles to be circumcised and follow Jewish food rules. Are there things that I am doing or saying, that are imposing my way of Christian living on others?

Prayers

Loving God as we celebrate the athleticism of all at the Olympics, we offer our prayers for those who came away disappointed they didn't win a medal, may they be encouraged to persevere and try again

Lord hear us: **graciously hear us.**

We thank you for your call, your gracious invitation to respond to your love that goes on reaching out to us until we have turned to you and accepted the gift of new life you long to give us.

Silence

Lord hear us: **graciously hear us.**

We pray for your guidance, strength and inspiration keeping our faith strong, keeping our eyes fixed on Jesus, keeping on in our race of life

Silence

Lord hear us: **graciously hear us.**

Hymn StF 504 May the mind of Christ my Saviour

live in me from day to day,
by his love and power controlling all I do or say.

May the word of God dwell richly
in my heart from hour to hour,
so that all may see I triumph
only through his power.

May the peace of God my Father
rule my life in everything,
that I may be calm to comfort sick and sorrowing.

Blessing May we run the race before us keeping our eyes fixed on Jesus. May we know that whatever we are going through, you say to us "I believe in you, that you've got what it takes to be who I've called you to be Amen. **Thanks be to God.**

We pray for those who resist your call, afraid of what commitment might mean. Conquer their doubts, overcome their hesitation and may they discover the blessing they have been missing.

Silence

Lord hear us: **graciously hear us.**

We pray for those who have responded to your call and then gone back, the faith they once professed grown cold, they have fallen and dropped out of the race. Inspire them to get up again, restore their vision and may they be thrilled to be racing again.

Silence

Lord hear us: **graciously hear us.**

May we run the race before us, strong and brave to face the foe, looking only unto Jesus as we onward go. May your call touch our lives, today and always, may we respond with heartfelt devotion and faithful service.

Silence

Lord hear us: **graciously hear us. Amen.**

May the love of Jesus fill me,
as the waters fill the sea;
him exalting, self forgetting —
this is victory.

May I run the race before me,
strong and brave to face the foe,
looking only unto Jesus
as I onward go.

Katie Barclay Wilkinson