**Good Shepherd Lutheran Church**

**Watertown, WI**

 **“Eyes on Jesus”**

Pastor Aaron Reseburg

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*Hebrews 11:17-31, 12:1-3*

I think it is safe to say that the vast majority of people on earth have run a race at least once in their life, even if it was only to the couch for the comfiest spot. I think it is also safe to say that the vast majority of people on earth would prefer to never race again. After all, what sane person would choose to run as fast as they can by choice?

Well, as some of you know, I am not one of those sane people. I love to race. I greatly miss the days when I could run long races, when I could push myself mentally and physically to the limit. Over hills, down hills, through the mud and fields, in the cold and in the hot. I miss being on the hunt, always trying to catch the next runner. These days, I feel much less like a hunter and much more like an animal trying not to fall over from exhaustion.

Being a runner, I have heard about a million running devotions based off of this passage from Hebrews. This text is so rich that there are about a million ways that you could go with it, but what really struck me going through it is the beginning of chapter 12, verse 2, “Looking to Jesus.”

You know, one of the most important things about your running form is your head. If you ever watch a high school or other race, look at the heads of the people in last and the people in first. The people in the front are not looking at the ground or the sky. They are looking straight forward; their eyes are focused on the direction they are going.

The author of Hebrews chooses running a race to describe the Christian life. I said before that I am one of the few people that choose to be in races. The truth is that every one of us is in a race right now, and the truth is also that none of us chose to be in it. Hebrews describes this race as the race that God has set before us. It was God who dropped you into the middle of this race.

In your baptisms, God has claimed you as His own. He gave you faith, and with your faith He gave you a pair of running shoes and a race bib. Whether you like it or not, right now, you are in the race. Races are tough and this one is no different. The Christian life is tough. Daily, we are assaulted by the devil, sin, and our own sinful natures.

We are called to difficult things: to deny ourselves and put our neighbor first, to follow God’s will instead of our own, to give up our free time and our money and give them to God instead. We are called to live radically different lives that the world around us, and that can lead to persecution. We are called to speak the truth about sin when we would rather just ignore it. We are called to love and forgive our neighbor, even when that neighbor is hard to love or forgive.

The Christian life is a tough race; many have given up the race, and many will continue to give up. Some people have given up the faith in a dramatic fashion and simply given up their faith boldly and publicly. Others have slowed down in the race, stopped coming to church, stopped giving, stopped reading their Bible, stopped praying, and have all but given up the race.

Life is full of ups and downs, pain and suffering, and bright shiny things that promise you fulfillment. Let’s not pretend that it’s only the bad things in life that distract us, it’s the good things too. They all draw our attention away from the race, they all draw us away from Christ.

We all have things in our lives that distract us from Christ. We all have things that have caused us to question God, things that cause us to look back, things that make us want to give up on the race and take the easy route.

I said before that the position of your head, where you are looking, is one of the most important parts of running form in a race. It’s the same for the race that Hebrews is talking about. We must keep our eyes fixed on Christ; we must keep our eyes fixed on the finish line. We need to see through the pains and the pleasures of this world and focus on Christ.

This race is difficult, and the truth is that, alone, this race is impossible. You and I will never make it on our own. No amount of good works, resolve, or focus will get you through this race. The only thing that will get you through this race is Christ, so keep your eyes fixed on Him and Him alone. When you fix your eyes on Christ, you will begin to see Christ in all the difficulties of this life.

Fix your eyes on Christ and run to where He promises to be. He is here today as your sins were forgiven. He is here today in His Word as it is read from the Bible and preached from my mouth. He is here today in His Holy Supper as He gives you His very own body and blood, given and shed for you.

Fix your eyes on Christ and ignore all the distractions of this world. He is the author and the founder and the perfector of our faith. Look to Him because He has done it all for you. He lived a perfect life; He was offered comfort, power, and authority but chose to suffer shame and scorn. He chose to suffer in this race for you. He knew that you could never do it, so He did it for you.

Christ’s perfect life and His righteousness are yours; they are a free gift given to you in your baptisms. All you have to do is trust. Trust Him and His promises to you. Look past all the pain and the suffering, all the pleasures and the glories of this world, and look to Christ. Look to Christ, and you will see that He is and has always been looking at you, not with cold judging eyes, but with loving and kind eyes. Look to Christ alone, and you will find the strength to finish this race.

One day, this race will be done, and our pain and suffering will be over. One day, Christ will return, and He will take our beaten and broken-down bodies and make them new again. He will make them what they were meant to be. On that day, you and all who have looked to Christ alone will climb out of your grave and greet your Savior eye to eye, and the race will finally be done.

In the name of Jesus, Amen.