

Sermon
Aug 18, 2019

“Let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us.”

1. The Derek Redmond story:

It was the summer Olympics of 1992. It was the quarter finals of the 400 meter sprint. British athlete Derek Redmond was one of the favorites for the gold medal. A lifetime of training had brought him to this moment..

A. The average Olympic runner trains for 4 hrs daily 310 days a year for 6 years before succeeding. That translates into more than 7000 hours of training for an event that may last less than 60 seconds. And Derek had trained for 8 years, approximately 1/3rd of his entire life!

B. The starter’s gun fired and the athletes burst out of the blocks.

Halfway through the race Derek Redmond was leading. Then disaster struck. He tore his hamstring and he collapsed on the track. The agony on his tear streaked face was both physical and mental. It was a crushing blow.

Medical attendants ran to assist him. Derek waved them away. He came to race and he was going to finish. He got to his feet and started hobbling down the track.

The crowd was mesmerized. And he did hop in agony the whole way to the finish line. The crowd gave him a standing ovation.

Although technically Redmond was disqualified and listed as “Did not finish” Derek Redmond was victorious. It was not the victory he expected or hoped for but it was a victory nonetheless. If you are old enough to remember, you will remember that it was one of the highlights of the 1992 Barcelona Olympics. One of the news headline’s after Derek’s race read, **“8 Years of Work, Training Come to a Painful but yet proud finish.”** Since that time, His performance has become the subject of 1 of the international Olympic committee’s “Celebrate Humanity” videos and has been used in advertisements by ViSA as an illustration of the Olympic spirit and has been featured in Nike’s “Courage” commercials of 2008.

2. Life has often been likened to a race.

3. The author of the Letter to the Hebrews writes, ***“Let us run with perseverance the race that has been set before us.”*** In order to encourage the Jews and to shore up their faith.
4. As we discovered last Sunday, the Jews who are the recipients of the Letter to the Hebrews are finding that the life of following Jesus brings shame, exclusion from the synagogue community, and persecution.
5. Their life has become difficult.
6. The fact is, life – like a race – is difficult.
7. The ancient Greek word for “race” btw is “agon” the root of our word “agony” or “agonizing.”
8. Life can be agonizing and yet I observe that we make it more so by:
9. A. not acknowledging the fact that life is difficult.
10. M. Scott Peck wrote a book in 1979 called the Road Less Travelled which was on the NY Times bestseller list for an astonishing 694 weeks.
11. A significant part of the book’s success is the result of its very first provocative sentences which read, **“Life is difficult. This is a great truth, one of the greatest truths. It is a great truth because once we truly see this truth, we transcend it.”**
Once we truly know that life is difficult – once we truly understand and accept it – then life is no longer difficult. Because once it is accepted, the fact that life is difficult no longer matters.”
12. But alas despite the incredible success of this book and the truth therein, we still prefer to pretend that life is or should be largely carefree and easy and ironically this makes an already difficult life still more so.
13. We make our lives - our race - more difficult also by comparing our race to the race of others. As soon as we start comparing, we realize that some people’s lives – races – seem much easier than our own, or somehow better.
14. Thank you social media. (No wonder young people feel so much pressure to look and be the perfect everything).
15. Finally, we make our already difficult lives more difficult by not factoring in the need for endurance, for perseverance to run our race to the end. .
16. **Ex – Blanche at age 100** – remarkable example of grace, beauty, dignity, and resilience. Her birth year was 1919, so imagine the world shattering events that she has lived through.

17. But also her own personal tragedies – has outlived her husband and one of her sons.
And yet she endures with such grace.
18. I don't think that it is any coincidence that she is also one of the most faith-filled persons I have known while in ministry. Through thick and through thin she has clung to her faith, continuing in prayer, worship, participation in the life of her church. For the better part of 10 decades.
19. A great majority of the most remarkable people at St. M's and in all the churches I have served are those in their 80's, 90's, and of course Blanche now 100.
20. We would do well to note the connection between and their ability to persevere in running the race set before them and their faithfulness
21. This brings me back to the story of Derek Redmond, which is also very much the story of Derek's father:
22. When Derek collapsed on the track with his torn hamstring, and started to hop toward the finish line Officials were at a loss as to what to do, when suddenly an older man ran down from the stands onto the track. He brushed off the security guards who tried to stop him by saying "I don't speak Spanish." (Remember this is Barcelona). He ran up beside Derek and placed his arms around him.

The man was Derek Redmond's father, Jim.

"You don't have to do this son" Jim said, meaning you don't have to hop to the finish line.

"Yes I do" Derek replied.

"Then we'll finish this race together" came the response from Derek's father.

Arm in arm, with agony on Derek's face, tears on his father's, Derek and Jim continued down the track. Derek buried his face in his father's shoulder. His father's strong shoulders carried his son physically and emotionally while continuing to wave away officials who tried to stop them.

Finally, accompanied by a now roaring crowd, standing on their feet and applauding, Derek Redmond crossed the line.

1. This is Derek's story but it is also the story of a father who will go to any lengths for his son. This is the picture of a father – WHO GIVES HIS SON THE FREEDOM TO FINISH THE RACE OR NOT FINISH BUT vows to BE BESIDE HIM NO MATTER WHAT.
2. Sisters and brothers, do I need to say that this is a beautiful picture of the Christian life?
3. Our secret for winning the race of life– is a heavenly Father who runs the race alongside us so that we can lean into him and allow him to carry us to the end.
4. Our secret is A heavenly Father who reminds us that in any circumstance of life we are never alone.

5. Story of assuming rectorship of a parish: “aren’t you glad you aren’t doing this alone?”
6. Our secret is A heavenly Father who through his own death on a cross has proven that he will go to any lengths for us so that no matter what earthly circumstances we find ourselves in, we will be victorious in Christ Jesus.