

Home Service for August 17, 2025

Welcome and Announcements

You may also find listening to some of your favorite hymns helpful in worship.

When life startles and upsets, faith looks forward. When questions and doubts arise, faith knows that God will prevail. Remember who you are and what God's love can do.

Call to Worship:

Give ear, God of all people. Stir up your strength and deliver us! Once you rescued your children from bondage. Now, set your people free. Look down from heaven, God of hosts. Turn to us anew and see us in our need. Restore us, God of Creation. Let your face shine upon us. May our suffering cease. May all your children be saved. Amen.

Opening Prayer:

Glorious God, we thank you for the cloud of witnesses, the multitude of the faithful of all ages, who surround us. Considering their example, and looking to Jesus, may we run the race of life faithfully. Encourage us, that we may not grow weary or fainthearted. Help us accept your gentle discipline, through the grace of Jesus Christ. Amen.

Prayer of Confession:

We give thanks, Precious Lord, that your love casts out fear, that your life transcends death itself. You simply ask that we maintain a posture of faith, with eyes open to the future you will bring. Forgive us when we pre-judge where we will, or will not, see you. We decide too soon whom we will listen to and whom we will dismiss. Forgive us; awaken us; restore our faith in you, that we may find new faith in ourselves and in the neighbors we meet. Amen.

Words of Assurance:

*By faith, we have been saved through faith.
This is not our own doing; it is the gift of God.
In the name of Christ you are forgiven.
In the name of Christ you are forgiven.
Thanks be to God. Amen.*

Read Psalm 80:1-2, 8-19

Hear us, Shepherd of Israel,
you who lead Joseph like a flock.
You who sit enthroned between the cherubim,
shine forth ² before Ephraim, Benjamin and Manasseh.
Awaken your might;
come and save us.

⁸ You transplanted a vine from Egypt;
you drove out the nations and planted it.

⁹ You cleared the ground for it,
and it took root and filled the land.

¹⁰ The mountains were covered with its shade,
the mighty cedars with its branches.

¹¹ Its branches reached as far as the Sea, ^[a]
its shoots as far as the River. ^[b]

¹² Why have you broken down its walls
so that all who pass by pick its grapes?

¹³ Boars from the forest ravage it,
and insects from the fields feed on it.

¹⁴ Return to us, God Almighty!
Look down from heaven and see!

Watch over this vine,

¹⁵ the root your right hand has planted,
the son ^[c] you have raised up for yourself.

¹⁶ Your vine is cut down, it is burned with fire;
at your rebuke your people perish.

¹⁷ Let your hand rest on the man at your right hand,
the son of man you have raised up for yourself.

¹⁸ Then we will not turn away from you;
revive us, and we will call on your name.

¹⁹ Restore us, Lord God Almighty;
make your face shine on us,
that we may be saved.

Prayers of the People:

We are such a fickle people, O Lord. It is easy for us to accept greedily your blessings in times of peace, and to cry for mercy in times of difficulty. We want you to pamper us. We want to be your special people. We don't like the idea that you might indeed care for those whom we would reject. Such is our lot! We need once again to be reminded of the many ways in which we have chosen to be the "wild grapes" rather than the faithful vines. We have been given opportunities time and time again to serve you by helping others. Today we have gathered in worship to praise you and to offer our gifts. But it is our commitment and our lives of service that you would appreciate. Witness and service to you are not easy. They may require some sacrifice. We may face some misunderstanding and ridicule from others. But you call us to be faithful, to be steadfast. Help us, O Lord, to make the kinds of commitments which will bring healing and hope in this troubled world in which we live. In Jesus' Name, we pray. AMEN.

Lord's Prayer

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name. Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day, our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For Thine is The kingdom, and the power and the glory forever and ever. AMEN

Read the Old Testament Lesson: Isaiah 5:1-7

I will sing for the one I love
a song about his vineyard:
My loved one had a vineyard
on a fertile hillside.

²He dug it up and cleared it of stones
and planted it with the choicest vines.

He built a watchtower in it
and cut out a winepress as well.

Then he looked for a crop of good grapes,
but it yielded only bad fruit.

³“Now you dwellers in Jerusalem and people of Judah,
judge between me and my vineyard.

⁴What more could have been done for my vineyard
than I have done for it?

When I looked for good grapes,
why did it yield only bad?
⁵ Now I will tell you
what I am going to do to my vineyard:
I will take away its hedge,
and it will be destroyed;
I will break down its wall,
and it will be trampled.
⁶ I will make it a wasteland,
neither pruned nor cultivated,
and briers and thorns will grow there.
I will command the clouds
not to rain on it.”
⁷ The vineyard of the Lord Almighty
is the nation of Israel,
and the people of Judah
are the vines he delighted in.
And he looked for justice, but saw bloodshed;
for righteousness, but heard cries of distress.

Read the Epistle Lesson: Hebrews 11:29–12:2

By faith the people passed through the Red Sea as on dry land; but when the Egyptians tried to do so, they were drowned.

³⁰ By faith the walls of Jericho fell, after the army had marched around them for seven days.

³¹ By faith the prostitute Rahab, because she welcomed the spies, was not killed with those who were disobedient. [\[a\]](#)

³² And what more shall I say? I do not have time to tell about Gideon, Barak, Samson and Jephthah, about David and Samuel and the prophets, ³³ who through faith conquered kingdoms, administered justice, and gained what was promised; who shut the mouths of lions, ³⁴ quenched the fury of the flames, and escaped the edge of the sword; whose weakness was turned to strength; and who became powerful in battle and routed foreign armies. ³⁵ Women received back their dead, raised to life again. There were others who were tortured, refusing to be released so that they might gain an even better resurrection. ³⁶ Some faced jeers and flogging, and even chains and imprisonment. ³⁷ They were put to death by stoning; [\[b\]](#) they were sawed in two; they were killed by the sword. They went about in sheepskins and goatskins, destitute, persecuted and

mistreated—³⁸ the world was not worthy of them. They wandered in deserts and mountains, living in caves and in holes in the ground.

³⁹ These were all commended for their faith, yet none of them received what had been promised, ⁴⁰ since God had planned something better for us so that only together with us would they be made perfect.

12 Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, 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, ² fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

Read the Gospel Lesson: Luke 12:49-56

“I have come to bring fire on the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled! ⁵⁰ But I have a baptism to undergo, and what constraint I am under until it is completed! ⁵¹ Do you think I came to bring peace on earth? No, I tell you, but division. ⁵² From now on there will be five in one family divided against each other, three against two and two against three. ⁵³ They will be divided, father against son and son against father, mother against daughter and daughter against mother, mother-in-law against daughter-in-law and daughter-in-law against mother-in-law.”

⁵⁴ He said to the crowd: “When you see a cloud rising in the west, immediately you say, ‘It’s going to rain,’ and it does. ⁵⁵ And when the south wind blows, you say, ‘It’s going to be hot,’ and it is. ⁵⁶ Hypocrites! You know how to interpret the appearance of the earth and the sky. How is it that you don’t know how to interpret this present time?”

Message

I think many people have the misconception that when you become a Christian, everything should become easy. All of your worries go away. All of your pain and suffering disappear. If you have enough faith, nothing bad will ever happen to you.

They think that Christianity is supposed to be a walk in the park. However, if you were to ask the Hebrew Christians in the first century, I think they would tell a different story. If we were to look at Hebrews, we would read about the persecution, hostility, and torture that these Christians faced. Some had been imprisoned, and others suffered the confiscation of their property. They also faced public abuse and ridicule. It doesn’t sound like being Christians made their lives any better. In fact, Christianity probably made their lives more difficult.

We don't face the same kind of persecution in our culture as those first century Hebrew Christians faced, but our lives are not perfect even though we claim Jesus as Lord. Maybe this is why the author describes Christian faithfulness as a race, and not just a short sprint, but a long race that requires endurance.

So how can we run this race of faith with endurance? I don't know how many of you have ever done any type of distance running, but if you have, you know how difficult it can be. When I was young and in much better shape, I coached cross-country and track, and we used to run about 5 or more every day. I was in the best shape of my life, and that felt good. There was a great sense of accomplishment when I could run off the stress of the day, besides motivating my athletes. It was never easy, but I did feel good and I experienced a calmness both physically and mentally. Truthfully, I felt closer to God at the end of a long run, which is always a better place.

Hebrews refers to the Christian faith as a race that must be run with endurance, it is talking about doing something that is difficult. One cannot just get up and run a marathon without training. There are things that runners must do in order to get themselves in shape to run. This is true in order to run the race of faith, there are things that we must do.

The text tells us that we must lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us. In other words, in order to run this race, we have to stop sinning. We must ask for God's forgiveness.

Our sin entangles us and weighs us down so much, that we are unable to run the race of faith. Our sin also keeps us from fixing our eyes on Jesus. When we face problems in our lives, do we always go to God in prayer and seek His guidance, or do we try to find our own solution? Face it, human nature is to try to do everything on our own. Our culture exalts the power of the individual. It tells us to just try hard and keep working at things, everything will work out perfectly. But no matter how hard we work, no matter how hard we try, everything doesn't always work out like we want it to, yet we keep trying to do things on our own. We fail to fix our eyes on Jesus, and this also keeps us from being able to run the race of faith.

Yet, though we fail to get ourselves into shape to run the race that God requires us to run, there is still hope for us. That hope is in the person and work of Jesus Christ. Our text reminds us that Jesus endured the cross for our shortcomings. Because we could not run the race, Christ ran the race for us. He ran the race for us because it gave Him joy to do so. Christ did not have to become a man and die for our sins. God would have been completely justified to leave us in our sins and condemn us all to death. But God loved us and wanted to save us. He wanted to

give us the ability to persevere in our faith, so Christ came down and ran our race for us. He did it for the salvation of our souls.

Christ's work for us does not end there. Bible tells us that Christ is now seated at the right hand of the throne of God where He pleads for us before the Father. Think, Jesus on our behalf makes intercession for us at the right hand of the throne of God. Through Christ's death on the cross and His rising from the dead, Christ perfects our faith. Our faith is perfected through the grace we receive in Christ. Through this grace, we are able to persevere in our faith. Jesus Christ perfected our faith by dying for our sins and empowers us to run the race of faithfulness.

Jesus Christ has taken away the weight of our sin. He takes the weight of our sin and throws it off of us so that we can run with endurance the race that is set before us. Our sin no longer weighs us down to the ground. We are no longer dead in our sins. We are able to get up and run the race of faith by putting our faith in Christ. The Christian race is far from being completely smooth sailing, but Christ gives us the grace that we need to persevere. We are also encouraged along the way by the faithful of both the past and present whom God has blessed through his grace.

Every person listed in chapter 11 of Hebrews had problems, but through their faith in God, they were able to run the race of faith with perseverance. When we look at these people, we see people just like us. They were sinners, and yet, by God's grace they were able to accomplish many things. These people were not perfect. A few examples would be: Abraham, fearing that he would be killed so that someone else could take his wife, so said that she was his sister. Jacob lived a life of deceit. He stole his brother Esau's birthright and blessing, and later deceived his father-in-law Laban. Moses tried to use every excuse he could come up with to convince God to find someone else to lead his people out of Egypt. Even David, a man after God's own heart, committed adultery with Bathsheba and then to try to cover his sin, and had her husband killed.

The same is true for us, and we see this every day. We read about Christians today who, because of their faith in Christ, are able to persevere in the faith. We hear and read about Christians, who despite persecution and oppression, because of their faith in what Christ have done, are able to persevere in the faith. Think for a moment about people we have and do pray for, because they face difficulties, limitations and health issues, but keep their faith. Think of those who have passed away, but have helped us to grow in our faith. They are all part of the great cloud of witnesses or as we usually say saints who have gone before us.

Now remember Hebrews 12:1-2, which states: "Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance and

the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.” We are not promised that running the race of faith is going to be easy. After all, it is still a race, and running a race requires perseverance. But we can run this race with perseverance. Just like God has given people that ability in the past, God gives that ability to people around us. And God gives that perseverance to us today and every day. So let us boldly run the race that is set before us, putting our faith in the One who gives us the power and endurance to run the race, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Benediction:

Children of God, go now in the presence of the great cloud of witnesses and in the blessing of God who forms us for community. May you find in God and one another the joy to persevere as we follow after Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, as we seek God’s kingdom on earth as it is in heaven.