

August 17, 2025

Tenth Sunday After Pentecost

“Enduring as He Endured”

Hebrews 11:17-31; 12:1-3

Some people enjoy running. I’d term it this way; some weird people enjoy running. I just don’t think running is considered a desirable pursuit for most folks. The vast majority of people only run when they are desperate to get somewhere quickly or when something undesirable is chasing them. Running is an exhausting struggle.

Yet even for those who claim to enjoy running, there is a limit. Runners do not finish a marathon and shout, “That was great. Let’s do it again!” Runners have a stopping point; a finish line. They don’t keep running endlessly.

*“Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us **run with endurance the race that is set before us**, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith...”*

This Christian faith, this race that is set before us, seems endless, does it not? It’s every single day, day after day after day. You train for a marathon but you get to rest and go to bed every night. Then one day you run it, you finish it and then you celebrate. It’s not all day every day.

This race of Christian faith is all the time and it can be exhausting, demoralizing and painful. Yet our Creator and Redeemer calls on us to run it always, with endurance. And what kind of endurance? This is not just enduring the normal struggles of faith like a runner endures the normal fatigue and oxygen deficit that comes with a long race. We are called on to endure like Christ’s endurance of the cross; His endurance of the hostility of sinners against Himself. Like Him, we are called to endure hatred and the rejection of the world because of our faith.

But does that even register with us? The Christian church in North America today, even in the LCMS, has this weird idea that the path of our race in faith is supposed to be clear, level and relatively free of difficulty, much less outright challenging or hostile. The thinking goes that if we do the regular and routine, go to church on Sunday, tithe our offering, not do the “really big” sins and feel bad about the smaller ones we do commit, then we’re running the race just fine.

So then, when some difficult, challenge or hostility does arise, we feel justified in completely dodging it without really considering that we may be failing to endure, instead veering of the course of the race that has been set before us.

This takes many forms. A believer has a chance to witness to someone about their faith in Christ, but it might be awkward, so they bite their tongue. A family member should be admonished of a sinful behavior, but fear of family strife again keeps one silent. Someone is hurting and in need of comfort, but one’s schedule is packed so that person receives the brush off. Daily prayer and pondering of God get jettisoned from one’s routine in favor of TV or video games because, after all, one went to church on Sunday so it’s all good for another week. And those examples aren’t even actual sins; just neglecting to endure the Christian walk.

Following Christ in faith calls us to humility, self-control, service and forgiving in Christian love, but we so quickly detour from that course in favor of prideful self-importance, anger at a perceived offense, avoiding serving others in favor of self-gratification. We fail to love because the other does not deserve it. We say we forgive, yet hold onto malice. And we rationalize that such thinking is okay, because we should not have to endure it.

We are clearly called to endure it. Christ endured it and calls on us to do the same. “Turn the other cheek” was not a joke. “Bear one another’s burdens” isn’t just a philosophy. We are to endure in the same manner as Christ, *“who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.”*

Our ultimate destination is dwelling in that same glory of His, thus we shouldn’t expect or insist that our road there should somehow be an easy and pristine walk in the park. We endure that which is unpleasant and detestable for the sake of Christ, and thus also for the sake of others.

This is a tough teaching, so *“Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted.”*

Jesus is the only way we can run this race. Of course we have His inspiring example of humble, selfless, sacrificial love unto the forgiveness of sins. But we have more than example; we have that forgiveness of sins.

We trip up or veer off the course in our race of faith. We aren’t disqualified. We have not lost this race. Jesus is always there. We come to Him in repentance and we are restored by His grace—back in the race. We are nourished by His body and blood and strengthened to endure. We are exhorted by His Word to continue because the outcome is guaranteed by His promise. His Holy Spirit enables us to endure the hardships, the humiliations, the sacrifices, knowing the outcome of our faith is His eternal presence.

Do not make the mistake of thinking that because you love Jesus life is supposed to be all unicorns and rainbows and you have some divine right to veer away from all unpleasantness. Doing that is saying, “I don’t have to run the race, I can take the bus instead.” There is no prize for riding the bus.

Make no mistake; enduring as Jesus did is tough. This is made explicitly clear in this passage from Hebrews. The part of chapter 11 that the lectionary skipped over is kind of gory, speaking of how faithful Christians were tortured, mocked, flogged, stoned, stabbed and even sawn in half. I don’t think any of us have been called to face that, but yeah, suffering shame for Jesus, risking awkward discomfort for Jesus, admitting our sin and telling another that we’re sorry for Jesus; sure, we’re called to all that; we should endure all that.

Recognizing our sin, repenting and putting it away from us, enduring the loss of that sinful indulgence—do I really have to tell you this is also what we are called to endure in Christ?

And again, like last week’s sermon, we can really wrongly receive all this as law, God’s Word saying how awful we are and how we need to improve. But No! This is Gospel.

This whole section is about we who have been called to faith; saved by the grace of God in Christ Jesus. *“Since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses...”* These are not examples of doing faith perfectly. They are examples of people like us who endured. Who repented, were forgiven, and yes, maybe faced nasty stuff, even death, yet remained trusting in God’s promise.

And I believe we should consider these more than just examples. *“Since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses...”* That phrase puts them with us in the here and now. Think of this as them cheering us on in this race that has been placed before us. I know that they’re in the presence of Jesus, glorifying Him for His work and will that sinners be saved. In that I can see them rooting for us, that we continue in His kingdom, enduring the shame to inherit the kingdom.

We are not alone. We are certain Christ is with us and in us, strengthening us for the race. And I don’t think it wrong to perceive the entire Christian church triumphant with Him, cheering us on as we run our race of faith.

Remember that word “endure”. “Endure” is that to which you have been called. Endure the broken world in love, even when it afflicts you. Endure the sins of others in love, even when the sin is against you. Endure the humbling of yourself in love and service to others who, according to the world, don’t deserve it. Endure the putting away of your own sin, even though your fallen nature seeks to justify it. Gladly then endure the shame of bringing your failure to do so before Christ, knowing that His perfect, loving endurance unto the cross has taken all those sins away.

Amen.