

## ***“Good to Grow – Run with Endurance”***

October 28th, 2018  
*Hebrews 12: 1-3*

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*“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, 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.” Hebrews 12:1-3*

Last week we celebrated the 190<sup>th</sup> anniversary of our Wall Street Church. We had a wonderful preacher, Rev. James Murray. As he was preparing for the service, he was asking about our church and our history. He knew, (maybe from our website?) that our church building dated back to 1830, but also that it was our 190<sup>th</sup> anniversary — and he wondered about those extra 2 years. So I picked up *The Meaning of the Stones*, which is our history book, and a wonderful one at that, and did a little research. From what I could figure out it seems we date our Anniversary to a meeting held on a frosty February day in 1828 at the Elizabethtown Chapel at Coleman’s Corners in Lyn. The meeting was to discuss plans to build a chapel in the growing village of Brockville. Up until that time they had been meeting for worship at the newly built Court House across the street, and in private homes for classes. It was two years later, in 1830, that the first building was built and dedicated.

Next Wednesday is All Hallows Eve and Thursday is All Hallows Day – better known as Halloween and All Saints Day. All Saints Day is traditionally a day to look back on the saints of the past. So many of the blessings we have today are built on the foundation of people in the past who have made a difference. When I say saints, I’m not just talking about St. Francis or St. Teresa of Calcutta — in the Protestant church we believe that we are all saints (and we are all sinners!). I’m talking about the people of faith from the past.

We are connected to the people of the past. We are connected in tangible ways — like through worshiping in a beautiful building that someone else sacrificed to build and that others sacrificed to maintain — but also through passing on the faith in Christ Jesus. That’s harder to see, and is even more important than the building. The saints of the past of this church and long before have handed us the baton. It is now our responsibility to carry it and to help it thrive until we pass it on to the next

generation. How can we be good stewards of what has been entrusted to us?

This fall we've been in a series called 'Good to Grow', to help us be the people and the church that we are called to be. As we wrap up the series this morning, we will look at an essential element we need to complete this call — endurance.

*"Let us run with endurance the race that is set before us".*

If any of you were under the impression that becoming a Christian and deciding to follow Christ would mean 'Be care-free!' then you don't need to look any farther than this passage to see for yourself that the Christian life is compared to running. I've been known to occasionally do something that looks a little like running, but I'm not a big fan. I'd rather do almost any other sport, but when it comes to exercise, running is so easily done. You don't need a gym membership or fancy equipment, you just need a pair of shoes and Bob's your uncle! I'd like to like running. Maybe someday we can get a little 'couch-to-5k' group going (ok maybe 'couch-to-3k'? ... couch to the door?...)

Anyway, the fact that the scripture does not say 'let us stroll with tranquillity the path that meanders before us', but instead says: "let us run with endurance" is a little hint that it's not going to be easy. Being a Christian is not easy because life is not easy – from health to relationships to work. I don't think it's ever been easy to be a Christian or to be the church together, but there is no question that we are in a very challenging time for the church, especially the western church.

The Christian church around the world is growing, but that's not the case in Europe and North America. The next decade will see so many more churches closing. And they are not closing because there isn't a need — the need is as great as ever, maybe greater. God knows and weeps over the pain and the poverty, the loneliness, the despair and the injustices that exist in peoples' lives and in the world. And for reasons I don't entirely get, God needs us to spread the light. God needs this church. God needs you to say 'Here I am Lord, send me'.

How do we endure when the going gets tough? One of the clues is right there in that tiny but powerful scripture. "Looking to Jesus the founder and perfecter of our faith." When you are going through a difficult time you need to keep your eyes on Jesus.

My son Stanley is turning 17 on Tuesday – I don't know where the time goes! I remember years ago we were sailing with some friends on the Ottawa River. It was a beautiful day, but there was not a lot of wind, so mostly we spent our time jumping out of the boat and swimming around in

the middle of that very wide river. At one point in the afternoon everyone was out of the boat swimming except for me and our friend Topher. (short for Christopher!) Topher was piloting the sailboat.

Stanley, who was 3 at the time, was wearing a life jacket, and he was also inside a life-ring that was attached to the boat. All of a sudden the wind whipped up and that sailboat was *really* moving. Stanley, who was the only one attached to the boat, was the only one who managed to stay with the boat. The others, my husband Alex, our friend Martha and my daughter Anna, no matter how hard they swam after us, couldn't keep up. Finally they just gave up and were left behind. Now this was in no way serious — we were simply going to double back and rescue the three stranded swimmers in the middle of the river. But I thought that Stanley would freak. You see he was quite nervous about swimming and had been very nervous swimming in deep water, but managed all right with people around him swimming with him. I watched him carefully from the boat, as he was all alone about 20 feet out at the end of the rope in the life ring, and I was ready to dive in and be with him if he started to panic. But as I watched, I was surprised to see that not only was he not scared — he was having the time of his life! The smile on his face as we whipped through the water was ear to ear. I just couldn't believe that he could be so thrilled when his dad, sister and friend were way behind him and he was moving so fast. But then I realized that from his perspective not much had changed. He was still looking straight ahead — looking at the boat as he had always been, and looking at his mother in the boat and at Topher who was controlling the boat. He had no fear at all because his eyes were not set on the others who were getting further behind, or on the waves or vastness of the river, but on boat he was tied to and at the people he loved in that boat. Instead of being worried, his expression seemed to say "What a ride!"

When we run the race that is set before us, the real work that we have is to keep our eyes on Jesus. How do you keep your eyes on Jesus? I don't know any other way, but to go back to the basics. The Church today desperately needs to get back to basics because these basics feed us and give us strength day by day. You need to make a weekly commitment to worship with your brothers and sisters in Christ. You need to read your Bible every day and pray every day and then do other things that will keep you connected; like join the Bible study group. It's about carving out space in your life so that your relationship with Jesus has room to grow.

For me that means setting my alarm for 5:45 or 6 in the morning. I know that if I don't get up at that hour before the kids and the world are awake, the demands of the day will always crowd out my good intentions of

reading the Bible and praying. I never really feel like getting up, but once I'm up it really is my favourite time of the day, with my cup of tea and my Bible and the dark sky slowly getting brighter.

This time of the day is what keeps me attached to Jesus' boat by a rope. And it's the boat, not me, that does all the hard work. It's by being attached to the boat that I catch the winds of the Holy Spirit and am taken to places I could never get to on my own strength. Listen to what the verse says: "looking to Jesus the *founder and perfecter of our faith*". You don't have to build your faith. You don't even begin to build your faith. You just need to train your eyes on Jesus, and he will build the foundation and he will keep on building and building towards perfection.

The other thing we need to do is to let go of the weights. Someone said, 'You can't run in an overcoat.' This is transformation work. This is the work of healing from past hurts and being set free from addictions and habits that separate us from one another and from God. The weights are things like unforgiveness of others or yourself. When we fix our eyes on Christ and let go of the baggage, we are better able to handle all of the hurdles and detours and obstacles that life and God's mission bring our way.

When you run the race that is set before you, and when you look to Jesus, you don't run it alone. *Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses...* I can't help but picture a stadium of saints from the past – some you know and remember and some you don't, cheering each one of us on. You are surrounded by a great a cloud of witnesses. They've been there and know those rocks that are tripping you up and making you feel like quitting. They are there encouraging you: "You can do it, I know it's hard, keep your eyes on him, you can do it!" I don't know who is in that multitude for you, perhaps someone you knew and loved who has gone on before you. This church has saints, too. Think of the 100's, no 1000's who have cared for and prayed for this church to shine a light in Brockville.

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I haven't yet discovered the joy of running. I'm willing to keep trying ... but I have discovered the joy of a life of faith. Though it's not easy, it is so incredible. There is life, there is peace in times of uncertainty, there's a love

that won't let us go and that moves mountains. I know many of you have discovered the joy of a life of faith in a real relationship with Jesus. It is beyond comparison and it is worth sharing.

I have more hope for the church in Canada and for this church in particular than I've ever had. That hope rests in Jesus, and that hope rests in seeing so many of you discover the joy.

Deciding to follow Jesus and saying that prayer "Lord use me", marks the beginning of a great challenge. It's not an easy one. There will be many times when you will wonder to yourself "Is it worth it?" But if you keep your eyes on Jesus you will see the darkness scatter inch by inch, mile by mile. You will see powerful hope springing up in the middle of despair. You will see the love and the kingdom of God spreading just a little bit farther. And one day you too will cross the finish line, one day your work will be complete and you will receive the crown of life, and you will proclaim as Timothy did: "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith" and "oh, *what a ride!*" Thanks be to God!