

Run to Win

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Texts: 1 Corinthians 9: 24-27

Good morning First Church!

Let me begin by expressing my most heartfelt appreciation our Senior Minister Pastor Dan, Pastor Lexi and the best co-intern in the world Pastor Carla, an amazing staff, and a warm and welcoming congregation. It was just over 9 months ago that I walked into this edifice for the first time. Since my administration and love has only grown deeper and I must thank God for such congregation. Also, let me thank the choir for Teeing up today's sermonic thought.

As you may or may not know, I am a native of Louisville, Kentucky a place known for being the birthplace of Muhammad Ali, Bourbon town - which I'm sure no one here or listening consumes, and the manufacturers of baseball bats known as Louisville Sluggers. Although, these accolades are honorable mentions, I'd like to note that they are missing one, the Kentucky Derby. I would be remised if I did not mention one observation that started about 15 days ago. Yes, you heard that correct just over 15 days ago the Kentucky Derby festival kicked-off the celebration with a parade, steamboat race, a marathon, brunches and on and on. Participants dress to impress. They ear wide brimmed hats, fascinators the vibrant colored dresses and suits. Trainers do all they can to prepare the horses for the big race and subsequent ones.

Jockeys do their best to maintain their weight and fitness to ensure they are eligible to compete. However, these events were just primer for a more important occasion. The 149th Kentucky Derby: Run for the Roses, took place, yesterday, Saturday, May 6th, 2023, at 6:57 PM ET at Churchill Downs literally lasting two minutes. Often, it is referred to as the "*The Most Exciting 2 Minutes in Sports*". In this race 18 horses compete to become the winner of the 149TH running of the Kentucky Derby, but only one can win the race. Can't you see these horses running around this muddy track to have a chance at taking home the roses and honored title? Once the horse makes it around the track and passes the finish line there is a certain group of pleased persons who may have placed a bet on the winning horse, a part of the trainer or owners' family or counted it as a favorite. However, there are others who leave

Churchill Downs less than happy. *“Mage was the winner. “The 15-1 shot gave trainer/co-owner and Hall of Fame o their first Derby win.” According to the Courier Journal, local newspaper of the City of Louisville, “Mage will be awarded with a \$1.86 million-dollar purse, a six-pound gold trophy and a blanket of roses.* Please note I am not standing in this house of worship condoning any act of gambling or have any ill intent, but rather using this common illustration to make a theological argument for your consideration. Amen.

The Apostle Paul is widely accepted as the author of our text this morning. He instructs the Church at Corinthian to the run the race in pursuit of glorifying God. Living, being and becoming for the glory of God is what gives purpose, meaning and significance to life. And that’s what determines how we live. Now I want you to know there are many different ways one can live his/her or their life on this earth; and to a certain degree get to decide you get to choose. You get to choose how you will live, whom you will commit to and the “race” you will run or legacy you will leave. Friends, how unfortunate it would be to come to the end of your life and to realize you climbed the wrong ladder, or you entered the wrong race, or you went after the wrong goal, you desired the wrong prize?

1. If you want to run to win, you must, identify your goal!

V. 25: “All good athletes train hard. They do it for a gold medal that tarnishes and fades. You're after one that's gold eternally.”

Paul taps in to the literary devices of metaphors in this concluding paragraph of this 9th Chapter. To compare the posture of the believer or one that is committed to the glory of the Lord he uses the analogy of a race to connect with the Church at Corinth. (“The analogy of comparing “athletic completion” of a foot race to “Christian living” is a theme often repeated in scripture. In this week’s Old Testament reading, Isaiah says that “those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength...they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint.” (Isaiah 40:31) Paul uses this comparison about his own ministry by checking with the leaders of the Church to make sure that he “was running or had run the race” of faith correctly.”)

“You've all been to the stadium and seen the athlete’s race. Everyone runs; one wins. “You might be wondering? Stadium? Sporting event? Yes, just like the Bruins/Celtics infest TD Gardens with diehard fans, professional athletes and grand competitions, the Isthmus Games held in Corinth were second only

to the Olympic Games in size and significance. Scholars agree that the athletic competition held every two years in Corinth was a pretty big deal. They didn't have the NFL or the NBA, they had the games, and the fastest runners were treated as heroes.

Like any other sporting competition, there was an overarching commitment to self-discipline. Months of early mornings, late nights were spent in the preparing for these sporting events to prime them for the foot race. Oh, I hear the voice of that great heavyweight champion and one of my personal heroes, Muhammad Ali, "I hated every minute of training, but I said, 'Don't quit. Suffer now and live the rest of your life as a champion.' Now, can be said of the believer to align themselves with the principles outlined in the word of God and in relationship with God.

This journey is not a sprint; rather, it's a marathon. There are times when we become discouraged, dismayed, disgusted and disconnected among other things. But be of good cheer, in those times I beg to remind you of the words of found in the book of Isaiah, "*God gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak... those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength... they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint.*"

Now to this prize, Paul reminds us that believers must know the goal! Just as a runner knows where the finish line is, the believer must align themselves with the eternal finish line. (Perhaps, not practical enough.) They (athletes) do it (compete) for a gold medal that tarnishes and fades. You're after one that's gold eternally. In that time the prizes were wreaths made of leaves.

(I press toward the mark of the high calling... Philippians 3:14)

"While he was not permitted to say much about it, the extremes to which he went in order to win the prize of life show how great his motivation was to please Jesus with all his deeds, how glorious eternity with God must be... And he has invited all believers to join him in seeking to live a life that matters for all eternity. To win the prize of life, a reward that is *imperishable*."

Matthew 16:26, "For what would it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?"

*In short, I want to argue today that Paul is advocating. for believers to trade the goal but emulate the discipline. Recently, (Peter) I researched tips on preparing for the Boston Marathon. Some of you may have heard me speak of my lofty goal of desiring to run in the Boston Marathon at some point. It is TBD – To Be Determined. Nevertheless, I came across a page entitled, “Boston Marathon Train Plans” which is produced by the B.A.A. There are four levels of training plans over a **the 20-week period** designed to help you whether you are running over five hours or going for a sub-three-hour marathon. In addition to the number of days per week, additional information (a weekly mileage range and long run distances) is provided to allow you to select the training plan that best suits you. The levels range from Novice to Advance. Friends, it is absolutely fascinating- What I appreciate most is the pace chart: 5k Interval and 10k Interval, Half Marathon, Marathon, Easy Runs and Aerobic Runs and Goal Times in averages per mile. I strongly believe in that same manner Paul urges us to run the race of life as one aligned with this faith tradition to use the manual (Bible) as the training in order for us to acquire the prize.*

2. If you want to run to win, you must, be determined

*V. 26: I don't know about you, but I'm running hard for the finish line. **I'm giving it everything I've got.***

The story is told about a tortoise and a hare. This literary classic is a tale of a race that occurred between a tortoise and a hare. For obvious physical reasons this race would be easy to call before it began. Of course, due to the agility of the hare, the hare would for all intents and purposes win this race. Can't you see this After all its opponent is a slow moving, but smooth operating tortoise. Well, brothers and sisters, the hare thought that way too. He was so sure he'd win the race that numerous times on the journey, this brother took time to rest, sign autographs, take selfies and attend a press conference. He was certain that his victory was tied to him, there would be no way, NEVER, for his opponent, the tortoise, to win whatsoever. Progressive, I come to tell you today, that brother tortoise keeps putting one foot in front of the other, he ran with dedication and while the hare thought more highly of himself than

he ought, he missed his chance to match his words with actions. Brother hare lost the race to the slow-moving tortoise.

Another translation says, I “So I run with purpose in every step. I’m not just shadowboxing.” Not going through the motions. I’m not here for photo ops, or because I want a tax deduction. I’m here because I have purpose in being here. I come to tell each of you that you have purpose in this race. You might not be the most fit, athletically built or so forth...

I hear that Gospel song: “Oh, Lord hold my hand while I run this race.

Oh, Lord hold my hand while I run this race.

Oh, Lord hold my hand while I run this race,

I don't want to run this race in vain, this race in vain.

Oh, guide my feet while I run this race.

Oh, guide my feet while I run this race.

Oh, guide my feet while I run this race,

I don't want to run this race in vain, this race in vain.

Oh, **Lord stand by me** while I run this race.

Oh, Lord speak for me while I run this race.

Oh, Lord speak for me while I run this race,

I don't want to run this race in vain, this race in vain.”