

May 4, 2019
Rev. Jane Florence
Title: "Courageous Faith"
Text: Hebrews 11



This is Marathon weekend in Lincoln. I do not run marathons; however, we run lots of races. There's what we call the "rat race" - a term coined apparently in 1930s in US referencing life which is an endless, self-defeating, or pointless pursuit. We are reduced to rats running in circles. We, as a nation, participated in the "space race" which started Aug 2, 1955. It began with the challenge to be the first country to put a satellite in orbit. Russians won that heat. Then it accelerated to be the first to put man in orbit. Russians won that one too. Then the challenge was the first to land on the moon. The US won and called race over. The space race actually was a spin off of the "arms race" which started earlier in the 1950s. It was the race to be the first to acquire enough arsenal to obliterate the our enemy then we gathered enough to obliterate the planet. No one won that one. Of course there are car races, and horse races, dog races and foot races

The Olympic races takes us back to Greece 700 years before modern era. That's almost 3,000 years ago, but racing goes back even farther. I suspect as long as we've had two feet humans have raced. The migration route to the Americas was through the steppes and tundra of Siberia and Alaska. Sometime between 15,000 and 12,000 years ago, humans followed mammoth to emerge upon the great plains. From the great plains our descendants walked and ran across mountain and desert, through jungle all the way to Patagonia. Native Americans evolved a lifestyle delineated by their abilities as walkers and runners.

In the Northeast, the Iroquois Confederacy was held together by running messengers who could cover the 240-mile Iroquois Trail within three days. In the far South, Aztec relay runners covered 260 miles in relay fashion within 24 hours. Apache Indians, who were renowned for their toughness could travel on foot over the roughest terrain from fifty to seventy-five miles a day, keeping this up for several days at a stretch. ¹ Renewed interest has come about to reclaim the Native running culture. One leader says, "The act of covering distances on foot is very important. It gives us a deep understanding of the landscape, the seasons," Martin says, adding that for many Native Americans, running is as much a spiritual exercise as a physical one. "In our culture, running is always connected to prayers. Or they tell you you're running for someone because you give them strength when you run," explains Sekaquaptewa. ²

¹ <https://ultrarunning.com/features/destinations/in-the-beginning-native-americans/>

² https://www.womensrunning.com/2019/02/get-inspired/first-runners-native-american-women_100937

We run for survival, to raise awareness or cure a disease. Humans run as social activism, as health practice and as spiritual practice. While there are lots of runners literally, the idea of running the race is also a great metaphor not only for our time but from ancient time. So great is the metaphor that the author of the letter to the Hebrews used it to make a faith statement 2,000 years ago. “Let us run with perseverance the race that is set out before us.” Obviously he wasn’t talking about a 26 mile footrace or a thousand mile migration. The statement comes at the end of what is commonly called the Hall of the Faithful.

Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.

By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to set out for a place ...not knowing where he was going.

By faith Isaac invoked blessings for the future on Jacob and Esau.

By faith Jacob, when dying, blessed each of the sons of Joseph

By faith Moses was hidden by his parents, and they were not afraid of the king’s edict.

By faith Moses, when he was grown up, refused to be called a son of Pharaoh’s daughter,

By faith he left Egypt, unafraid of the king’s anger;

By faith the people passed through the Red Sea as if it were dry land,

By faith the walls of Jericho fell after they had been encircled for seven days

For time would fail me to tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets— ³³who through faith conquered kingdoms, administered justice, obtained promises, shut the mouths of lions, ³⁴quenched raging fire, escaped the edge of the sword, won strength out of weakness, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight. Others were tortured, ³⁶Others suffered mocking and flogging, and even chains and imprisonment.

³⁷They were stoned to death, they were sawn in two, they were killed by the sword; Yet all these, though they were commended for their faith Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and the brokenness that clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us. Hebrew 11

The passage presents the idea of faith as the courage to endure. The passage doesn’t say anything about a belief system. Faith here is not about belief. Faith is action, courageous action. The author says by faith the people before us set out on a journey of unknowing, and blessed others, disobeyed tyrannical ruling powers, led people out of slavery, by faith people administered justice, and won strength out of weakness...” This passage tells us example after example that says faith is seen through difficult challenges, impossible odds, insurmountable obstacles - and people who had the courage to face the challenges of life to persist in their expression of God’s love and their journey- they are the hall of the faith. Faith is the Courage to act.

Courage is having faith brave enough to live as the sacred beings the Divine calls us to be. Sometimes our act of faith is just that we lace up the running shoes and start out. That act in itself might be a win for you. For each of us, courageous faith may be different. By faith sometimes that you get out of bed when winter months drag on and depression wraps her arms around your legs and holds on tight, getting out of bed some days is a great act of courage.

By faith we send our children to school and go to work and church, when news alerts could lock us all home in fear.

By faith we challenge laws and lobbyist to value life over possession.

By faith we feed one hungry man, when we know there are so many more, and we wonder if one sandwich makes a difference.

By faith, we live and move and have our being enveloped in God's grace infused in God's courage.

By faith we gather for worship when we aren't sure of what we believe anymore or when we doubt more than we know, we gather in faith.

By faith we show up for one another when we don't particularly have a 'need' of our own, so we think we can stay home and it won't really matter, by faith we show up because there may be someone who needs us to be here.

By faith we teach our children to do the same, and we have courage to insist that our presence is important. In the mystery of faith, we commit to show up.

By faith we join together believing that together we can make a difference in the world.

Faith is the courage to act when we might not want to but know it's the right thing to do.

Since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and the brokenness that clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of faith..

Faith is courage to live a life as Jesus showed us full of courage of our ancestors' faith. May it be so.