

Keep on Running, Even with the Wind in Your Face and Your Insides in Agony. Persist to Win, Regardless.

"Jesus leaves no place for half-hearted commitment," the Rev. Dr. Brook Thelander said in his sermon Sunday on 1 Cor. 9:24-27. "The stakes are high. A great deal is at stake. We've got to want it, and want it badly.



"Transfiguration" by Lorenzo Lotto (ca. 1480-1556), © Web Gallery of Art. As we will hear in the Gospel lesson Sunday, "Jesus' appearance changed, and his clothing became dazzling white, far whiter than any earthly process could ever make it." In the O.T. lesson we will hear, "Moses . . . wasn't aware that his face had become radiant because he had spoken to the Lord."

"In fact," he continued, "if athletes can discipline themselves and train for months and years to compete for a crown that fades away, what might be required of those of us who would follow Jesus, where the prize is eternal?"

"When Paul speaks of athletes' using self-control here, the Greek word is *agonizomai*. From this word come our English words 'agonize' and 'agony.' . . . I get the sense that Paul realizes that following Jesus is not just about rejecting sin, but also about saying no to *anything* that might hinder his spiritual progress, even if such things are legitimate in themselves. What's more, his walk with Christ requires the discipline to say no to anything in *his* life that might cause others to struggle in *their* walk with Christ. . . .

"Listening to Paul this week, then, was hard for me. I could almost hear him whisper in my ear and say, 'Brook, how badly do you want to follow Jesus? How much do you *really* want it? Do you want it badly enough to lay aside some things and pick up others? Do you want it badly enough to discipline yourself to change ways of thinking or acting that may be in the way of your growth in grace? Do you want it badly enough to sacrifice your own interests at points where what others *need* may be more important than what you *want*?'

"This can be a little disheartening, because on the surface level Paul's words here all seem to be about *us* and *our* efforts and *our* resolve and *our* action. One could wonder: Where is God in all of this? Where is the empowering presence of the Holy Spirit?"

What Paul recounts immediately following this passage, however, "is a reminder to us that our discipline, our sacrifice, is merely joined to what God is already doing—which is everything! But the reason that discipline and sacrifice are so important is that without them we run the risk of *presuming* on God's grace. When we do this, we become spiritually 'out of shape,' which makes us vulnerable and weak when things get difficult. We can be lulled to sleep, and think that we can 'get by' as Christians by giving less than our very best. Note Paul's words (in chapter 10): 'Just experiencing God's wonder and grace didn't seem to mean much (to the Israelites). Most were defeated by temptation during the hard times in the desert.'

"Now, it would be so easy to turn this sermon into some kind of exhortation calling on you (p. 2→)

Editor: Box 972, Boise, ID 83701. 208-336-3951, harbingermail@aol.com

Pastor: The Rev. Dr. Brook Thelander, epworthrector@msn.com

On the Web: www.epworthchapelonthegreen.org

Sundays, 10:00 a.m.: Word & Table service

Sundays, 11:30 a.m.: Refreshments, conversation

Sundays, 11:45 a.m.: Moderated post-service discussion

Thursdays, 7:00 p.m.: Lenten Evening Prayers

**Ash Wednesday,
7 p.m.: We
pursue holiness.**

For the poor: Ground beef; chicken; bacon; fresh produce (particular need now); canned fruits and vegetables; milk; cutter; cheese; cooking oil; pancake mix and syrup; dry cereal; chili powder; garlic powder; diapers and baby wipes; toilet paper; soap; shampoo and conditioner; razors; shaving cream; men's, women's and children's new underwear; cleaning supplies and bleach.

Readings. 2/22: Ex. 34:28-35; Ps. 99; 2 Peter 1:16-21; Mark 9:2-9. **Ash Wed.:** Joel 2:1-2, 12-17; Ps. 103:8 *et seq.*; 2 Cor. 5:20—6:10; Mt. 6:1-6, 16-21; Ps. 51. **3/1, 10 a.m.:** Gen. 9:8-17; Ps. 25:1-10; 1 Peter 3:18-22; Mark 1:9-13. **3/1, 6 p.m.:** Deut. 8:1-10; Ps. 96; 1 Cor. 1:17-31.

Prayer Emphases: Zimbabwe: Association of Free Congregations; First Church of the Nazarene, Chicago, IL, and the Rev. Dr. Kevin Ulmet; Jews for Jesus; parishioners on Leisure Drive.

(Sermon, cont'd.) to sacrifice more, or to be more disciplined in your lives, but that would be the wrong thing to do. I don't believe any of you would be here this morning if you were not serious, and if you were not in this race to win. . . . Hear this Good News this morning: the sacrifice, the discipline, the effort you are expending in your walk with Christ is being used of the Spirit this morning to strengthen you, to bear you up, and to prepare you for what is yet to come. The grace of God is working through your disciplined and sacrificial efforts *now* in order to prevent mistakes and heartaches later on. You may feel the agony now, but all that means is that the Holy Spirit is at work in you, giving you strength so that you can go the distance. As we prepare to go to the table this morning, I want to ask something very special of each of you: Keep on running. The wind may be strongly blowing in your face, but keep going. Your insides may be in agony; keep going. Resolve in this moment that no matter what, you're in this race to win. And I believe that as we receive these tangible signs of bread and wine, we'll receive grace and help to do just that."