

Order of Worship for August 14, 2022

Prelude

P: The Lord be with you,

C: **And also with you.**

Opening Hymn: *“Lord, Keep Us Steadfast in Your Word”* - Hymn #655

Confession and Forgiveness:

P: In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

C: **Amen.**

P: Our God desired good for us, to lead us at last to our heavenly home.

C: **Let us therefore lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely.**

P: Let us confess our sins to almighty God, seeking His forgiveness for the sake of our holy mediator, Jesus Christ, God's Son.

P: Almighty and most merciful God,

C: **We are beset by sin and helpless to overcome it. Knowing the great mercy You exercised toward those who have gone before us, our ancestors in the faith, we confess our many sins to You. Forgive us, for we look to Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of our faith.**

P: For the joy that was set before Him, Jesus Christ endured the cross, disregarding its shame. For His sake your sins are forgiven.

C: **Amen! Thanks be to God!.**

Psalm 55

P: Cast your burden on the LORD, and He will sustain you.

C: **He will never permit the righteous to be moved.**

P: Give ear to my prayer, O God,

C: **and hide not Yourself from my plea for mercy.**

P: My heart is in anguish within me;

C: **the terrors of death assail me.**

P: Fear and trembling have beset me;

C: **horror has overwhelmed me.**

P: But I call to God,

C: **and the LORD will save me.**

All: Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit; as it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.

P: Cast your burden on the LORD, and He will sustain you.

C: **He will never permit the righteous to be moved.**

Prayer of the Day:

P: Merciful Lord, cleanse and defend Your Church by the sacrifice of Christ. United with Him in Holy Baptism, give us grace to receive with thanksgiving the fruits of His redeeming work and daily follow in His way; through the same Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

C: Amen.

First Lesson: Jeremiah 23:16–29

R: Thus says the LORD of hosts: “Do not listen to the words of the prophets who prophesy to you, filling you with vain hopes. They speak visions of their own minds, not from the mouth of the LORD. They say continually to those who despise the word of the LORD, ‘It shall be well with you’; and to everyone who stubbornly follows his own heart, they say, ‘No disaster shall come upon you.’” For who among them has stood in the council of the LORD to see and to hear His word, or who has paid attention to His word and listened? Behold, the storm of the LORD! Wrath has gone forth, a whirling tempest; it will burst upon the head of the wicked. The anger of the LORD will not turn back until He has executed and accomplished the intents of His heart. In the latter days you will understand it clearly. “I did not send the prophets, yet they ran; I did not speak to them, yet they prophesied. But if they had stood in My council, then they would have proclaimed My words to My people, and they would have turned them from their evil way, and from the evil of their deeds. “Am I a God at hand, declares the LORD, and not a God afar off? Can a man hide himself in secret places so that I cannot see him? declares the LORD. Do I not fill heaven and earth? declares the LORD. I have heard what the prophets have said who prophesy lies in My name, saying, ‘I have dreamed, I have dreamed!’ How long shall there be lies in the heart of the prophets who prophesy lies, and who prophesy the deceit of their own heart, who think to make My people forget My name by their dreams that they tell one another, even as their fathers forgot My name for Baal? Let the prophet who has a dream tell the dream, but let him who has My word speak My word faithfully. What has straw in common with wheat? declares the LORD. Is not My word like fire, declares the LORD, and like a hammer that breaks the rock in pieces?”

R: O Lord, have mercy on us.

C: Thanks be to God.

Second Lesson : Hebrews 11:17–31, 12:1–3

R: By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises was in the act of offering up his only son, of whom it was said, “Through Isaac shall your offspring be named.” He considered that God was able even to raise him from the dead, from which, figuratively speaking, he did receive him back. By faith Isaac invoked future blessings on Jacob and Esau. By faith Jacob, when dying, blessed each of the sons of Joseph, bowing in worship over the head of his staff. By faith Joseph, at the end of his life, made mention of the exodus of the Israelites and gave directions concerning his bones. By faith Moses, when he was born, was hidden for three months by his parents, because they saw that the child was beautiful, and they were not afraid of the king’s edict. By faith Moses, when he was grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh’s daughter, choosing rather to be mistreated with the people of God than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin. He considered the

reproach of Christ greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt, for he was looking to the reward. By faith he left Egypt, not being afraid of the anger of the king, for he endured as seeing Him who is invisible. By faith he kept the Passover and sprinkled the blood, so that the Destroyer of the firstborn might not touch them. By faith the people crossed the Red Sea as if on dry land, but the Egyptians, when they attempted to do the same, were drowned. By faith the walls of Jericho fell down after they had been encircled for seven days. By faith Rahab the prostitute did not perish with those who were disobedient, because she had given a friendly welcome to the spies.... 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.

R: O Lord, have mercy on us.

C: Thanks be to God.

Hymn of Response: “*Run to Finish*” (Norm)

Refrain: Let us run to finish the race that’s set before us throwing off the sin that ties us down.

Let us run to finish, run with perseverance keeping our eyes on the Lord.

1. Since we are surrounded by our brothers and our sisters, we can share the confidence to turn away from sin. And run to follow Jesus, our Savior and our Brother, Who endured the cross to set us free. *Refrain.*
2. We will stand united we will share the struggle, we will not grow weary and we will not lose heart. For we are led by Jesus, He’s our Author and Perfecter, and He endured the cross to set us free. *Refrain.*

Third Lesson: Luke 12:49-56

P: [Jesus said:] “I came to cast fire on the earth, and would that it were already kindled! I have a baptism to be baptized with, and how great is My distress until it is accomplished! Do you think that I have come to give peace on earth? No, I tell you, but rather division. For from now on in one house there will be five divided, three against two and two against three. They will be divided, father against son and son against father, mother against daughter and daughter against mother, mother-in-law against her daughter-in-law and daughter-in-law against mother-in-law.” He also said to the crowds, “When you see a cloud rising in the west, you say at once, ‘A shower is coming.’ And so it happens. And when you see the south wind blowing, you say, ‘There will be scorching heat,’ and it happens. You hypocrites! You know how to interpret the appearance of earth and sky, but why do you not know how to interpret the present time?”

P: O Lord, have mercy on us.

C: Thanks be to God.

Children’s Message

Sermon Hymn: “*Saints, See the Cloud of Witnesses*” - **Hymn #667** (needs introduction)

Sermon: “Cloud of Witnesses” - Hebrews 11:17–31, 12:1–3

Earlier this week was the second Major League Baseball game held at the Field of Dreams site in northeast Iowa, this year featuring the Chicago Cubs and the Cincinnati Reds. Last year’s game, between the Chicago White Sox and the New York Yankees, was almost universally praised. The players walked out of the cornfield wearing throwback uniforms. Actor Kevin Costner, who had the lead role in the Field of Dreams movie, appeared, as did celebrities from throughout the world of baseball, and those Iowa residents who were lucky enough to win the ticket lottery.

Part of the movie’s success lies in its ability to recall an earlier, simpler time. As Terrence Mann, a reclusive author played by James Earl Jones, says to Kevin Costner’s character Ray, “The one constant through all the years, Ray, has been baseball.... This field, this game: it’s a part of our past, Ray. It reminds us of all that once was good and that could be again.” The connection across generations, the search for a restored relationship between a father and a son, the chances taken and challenges face to realize a dream all help make the movie memorable.

The author of Hebrews never saw a baseball game, but knew about connections across generations and the joys and struggles that come in athletic endeavors. Today we hear the second half of the great chapter on the heroes of the faith. Hebrews 11 gives us many stories of the great heroes of the faith. Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses. The list goes on; discussing people who were a thousand years gone at the time the book of Hebrews was written, almost 2000 years removed from us. People who had lived lives of faith, but had struggled in following God’s commands, too. People who had run the race of life, and now were with God.

The word used for race in our text also has the connotation of a struggle or fight. That is exactly what we experience every day. As you run the race of faith, you struggle with sweat pouring in your eyes or the tiredness that just makes you want to stop and rest. In our spiritual race we struggle with our sinful nature, the sinful world that surrounds us, and the evil one which all daily try to take our eyes off Christ, the author and perfecter of our faith. The witnesses, those who’ve run the race before, know those struggles and temptations.

But what do we do if all that does not appear to be enough? What if, despite a cloud of witnesses, despite that cheering section, despite our perseverance and sacrifice, we do not know whether we can hold out to the end? Just having a cheering section isn’t enough.

One of the other tag lines from *Field of Dreams* is “Go the distance.” It comes along with the clue that takes Ray and Terrence from Boston to small-town Minnesota to find a doctor who had played in one major league baseball game, but had never batted. It provides the encouragement they need to continue on their journey, no matter how strange it seemed and no matter what obstacles they faced.

The writer of Hebrews doesn’t say “Go the distance,” but has one final similar word of advice. “Let us run the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith.” Pioneer translates a particularly rich Greek word, *archegos*. The *archegos* is the author, the

beginner, the instigator, the trailblazer who goes before us. In the context of a race, the archegos is the team captain. In the Greek games, the team captain would run the race and then wait at the finish line to encourage his teammates as they followed in his steps. Yet Jesus is not simply the pioneer; he is also the perfecter. Priests perfect and complete what we lack, bringing us to our goal so that we may have full access to the presence of God. So Jesus not only calls us across the finish line but also fills in and fills out what is lacking in our faithfulness. He takes our incomplete faith and makes it whole.

Derek Redmond was a young British athlete who ran the 400-meter in the 1992 Olympic Games in Barcelona, Spain. Derek's father, Jim, was high in the stands as a witness to the long-awaited race.

Derek had a good start and lead in the race. As Derek approached the finish line, he heard a pop in his right leg and knew that it was a severe hamstring injury. He realized his Olympic dreams are dashed. With tears streaming down his face, he declares that he doesn't want to take a DNF, a "Did-Not-Finish."

Derek continues the race with one leg. He uses all of his strength to limp in anguish towards the finish line. As the crowd cheers, fans rise to their feet, and their cries grow louder and louder, building into a thundering roar.

At that moment, Jim Redmond, his father, reaches the bottom of the stands, vaults over the railing and wraps his arm around his son's waist. "I'm here, son," Jim says gently, hugging his boy, "We'll finish together." As they crossed the finish line, the crowd of 65,000 gave them a standing ovation.

We'll finish together. While we think of racing as an individual event, it's not. In high school or earlier, runners run as part of a team, and the individual results affect which school wins the meet. Many of those who train to run marathons train as part of a running club, and even on the day of the race, find someone to keep pace with so they can complete the race. Bikers keep pace with a leader, following the peloton and riding in the draft of those who are in front. Drivers may get the fame in auto races, but they wouldn't make it far without their pit crew. We think of faith as an individual event. It's not. God's purpose is not to save isolated individuals, but to create a community, the church, that cares for each other.

So when our knees are weak and our hands drooping, when we feel worn out in the journey of faith, wondering whether we can hold on and hold out, we hear again this call from Hebrews. We remember our company, those running the race with us and those who have finished the race and are cheering us on. We remember our contest, but above all, we remember our captain who has run this race and who beckons us home. Jesus has run the race, and leads us across the finish line.

Third Article of Creed and Explanation:

Responsive Prayer on the Cloud of Witnesses

P: We give thanks to You, O Lord our God, for all Your servants and witnesses of time past. As we remember them, give us their faith.

Abel, the first to die;

C: Protect us so that we die resting in our faith in You.

P: Noah, who remained faithful in the midst of a wicked generation;

C: Strengthen us as we face the wickedness of our own time.

P: Abraham, the father of believers, and Sarah his wife;

C: Guide us to live and sons and daughters of father Abraham.

P: Moses, the lawgiver, and Aaron, his brother, the priest;

C: Lead us as they lead Israel out of slavery.

P: Rahab, Miriam, Deborah, Ruth and all the faithful women;

C: Help us to trust in You when all the odds seem against us.

P: Gideon and for all the judges of Israel;

C: Make us trust in You no matter how outnumbered we can be.

P: Samuel and all the prophets;

C: Open our lives to hear and live according to Your promises.

P: All the martyrs and saints in every age and in every land.

C: Send Your Holy Spirit on us to follow them as they followed You.

P: We give you thanks, O Lord, that You have surrounded us with such a great cloud of witnesses: Grant that, encouraged by the good example of these Your servants, we may persevere in running the race that is set before us, until at last, with all Your saints, we attain to Your eternal joy; through Jesus Christ, the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

C: Amen.

(other requests)

Lord's Prayer:

Closing Prayer:

P: Lord God, You have called Your servants to ventures of which we cannot see the ending, by paths as yet untrodden, through perils unknown. Give us faith to go out with good courage, not knowing where we go, but only that Your hand is leading us and Your love supporting us; through Jesus Christ, our Lord.

C: Amen.

Blessing (Pastor)

C: Amen.

Closing Hymn: "I'm but a Stranger Here" – Hymn #748

Postlude