

Read

Hebrews 11:39-12:13

Consider

24th Winter Olympics ended last Sunday. For over two weeks, 2,871 athletes from 91 nations gathered in Beijing to take part in over 100 different winter sport events. I watched in awe how athletes performed aerial twists and flips in big air, slopestyle, halfpipe freeski and all these nerve-racking ice events. With no exception the athletes stepped out, committed to give their all before the watching eyes of the world. That was what they were there for. There were moments of scary crashes. Some fell hard on the ice. But they would pick themselves up, went on to make their way to the finish line. While the top three were rewarded with medals, most participants might never get onto the podium. But the one thing in common that all athletes can tell us is that they had their Olympic moments and their Olympic experience. They have represented their countries before the world. Hebrews 12:1 tells us that we too have a race to run. It is a race marked out for us and we must endure all odds to complete it.

Hebrews was most likely written in the second half of first century, probably before the Siege of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. We are not sure exactly when, who wrote it and to whom it was written. The literary style is in the form of a homily, a written sermon rather than a spoken letter. And for sure we know that the author is not preaching into thin air with nobody in mind. No, the preacher is addressing a real and urgent problem in church. Things are not looking good. There are serious concerns. As acclaimed preacher-scholar Thomas Long describes:

His congregation is exhausted. They are tired – tired of serving the world, tired of worship, tired of Christian education, tired of being peculiar and whispered about in society, tired of the spiritual struggle, tired of trying to keep their prayer life going, tired even of Jesus. Their hands droop and their knees are weak (12:12), attendance is down at church (10:25), and they are losing confidence. The threat to this congregation is not that they are charging off in the wrong direction; they do not have enough energy to charge off anywhere. The threat here is that, worn down and worn out, they will drop their end of the rope and drift away. Tired of walking the walk, many of them are considering taking a walk, leaving the community and falling away from the faith. (Long 1997, 3*)

In the past 4 Sundays, we have been checking out the Faith Hall of Fame found in Hebrews 11. We walked down the memory lane to Abel, Noah, Abraham, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, and all the way to the judges, to David, Samuel and the prophets... all these heroes of faith. They were commended for their faith. As we turn to Hebrews 12, we are taken back to the current time, to the playing field where we find ourselves. And we are exhorted to run the race marked out for us. But the questions boil down to: What have all these heroes to do with us in our times? How is their faith related to my faith? Reckoning that there is a race marked out for us, but then how can we run when we our arms are

feeble and our knees weak? How can we finish the race when life is so tough and we are so tired and exhausted? How can we endure all the hardship that lies in our path? How can we stand firm in faith? Let us explore what the preacher has to say about these in Hebrews 11:39-12:12.

See you Sunday.

Deaconess Josephine Chow

** Lonng, Thomas G. 1997. Hebrews: Interpretation.. Louisville, KY: John Knox Press.*

D i v i n g D e e p e r

Read 11:40

- In what ways are we Christians have something better than the faith heroes listed in Hebrews 11:1-38?
- We see that need these faith heroes as we learn and receive from them lessons and heritage of faith. But how come they need us so they would be made perfect?

Read 12:1-3 Consider we faith-bearers running the race in a stadium.

- What did the Preacher in Hebrews mean by “throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles”?
- What are some examples of weights/burden that hinder our race of faith?
- In what ways does sin ‘easily entangle’ us? Can you name some examples from your experience?
- What specific things or steps that can help us ‘throw off’ weights and sins to make sure they do not impede our running?
- What do you know about the race marked out for you? Do you know to where and for what you are running? Examine the roles, work or purposes that God has called you or laid on you to accomplish.
- What is meant by ‘run with perseverance’? Why is perseverance needed?
- Consider “Fix your eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith”. Why do we need to fix our eyes, and why on Jesus?

Read 12:4-13

- We are charged to “endure hardship as discipline”. What are the reasons given here that we need to endure?

Reflect on your faith journey. How are you running? What challenges are you currently facing? Apply today’s lessons and prayerfully commit your running to the Lord.