

Twentieth Sunday after Pentecost
Saint Dunstan's Episcopal Church, Houston, Texas
26 October 2025

2 Timothy 4

You may remember British runner Derek Redmond who arrived at the 1992 Barcelona Olympics with high hopes, having already broken records and won international golds. His father, Jim Redmond, was there as always, cheering from the stands. When the 400-meter semifinal began, Derek took an early lead. Then, just 175 meters from the finish, he felt a sudden pop in his right hamstring. He collapsed in pain, clutching his leg as medics rushed toward him. Refusing the stretcher, Derek said, "I'm going to finish my race." He rose and began to limp down the track, step by agonizing step. From the crowd, Jim ran to his son's side and put his arm around him. "I'm here, son," he said gently. "We'll finish together." With tears streaming, Derek leaned on his father's shoulder. Together they walked the final meters, side by side. The crowd of 65,000 stood, cheering and weeping, as father and son crossed the line. Though Derek lost the race, he won the hearts of millions. It became one of the most powerful moments of love, perseverance, and courage in Olympic history.

Today, we hear from the Apostle Paul the following words: "I am already being poured out as a libation, and the time of my departure has come. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith." Using metaphors from the Greek games and the gymnasium, Paul describes life as a fight, a race, and an act of endurance. These are metaphors that are familiar to us today. We say things like "I am fighting against time and Life is a struggle." Most of us fight enemies that are sometimes visible and most of the time invisible. Not only do we fight to achieve our goals in the corporate and personal worlds, but we often have to fight against the very real threats of anxiety, illness, economic downturns, interpersonal conflicts, etc. Not to mention the invisible enemies of fear, hatred, doubts, insecurities, hopelessness, and helplessness. We in fact face many enemies, both visible and invisible. Life is a fight and a struggle.

Paul also compares life to a race. We often say that someone has entered or has left "the rat race". There is natural competition built into every area of life: we interview for jobs where someone is always the winner, and many are the losers. We compete for spots at fancy schools and clubs. We compete for the recognition and the respect of others, for advancement in our jobs, for success in the stock markets, and for power and control over the systems to which we belong.

Lastly, Paul compares life to an act of endurance. Those who endure to the end survive and those who don't perish. A marathon runner can only hope to win by remaining faithful to their training (1 Corinthians 9:24-26). In order to fight the good fight and run the race successfully; we must condition ourselves and constantly exercise our skills and talents. Practice makes perfect and those who endure daily in their training will survive to the end and will win the crown of glory. Running successfully the race of life requires sacrifice, commitment, single-minded determination, drive, and ambition.

Now, Paul declares triumphantly, "I have fought the good fight, I have run the race, I have kept the faith (I have endured)". Paul's life has been a fight, a race, and an act of endurance, not because he was seeking the spotlight, competing for personal glory, or propelling himself forward by his own strength. This Good Fight had a purpose: to eradicate the forces of sin and hopelessness that enslave the human heart, through the power of the Gospel of Jesus of Nazareth. Paul had a single-minded determination to spread the Gospel of the Lord to all the ends of the world, at any personal cost (2 Cor 11:23-27). To do this Paul had to fight against intolerance, close-mindedness, ignorance, fear, institutionalized religion, corrupt governments and politicians, back-sliding friends, arrogant opponents, and powerful adversaries from within his own people.

Paul's amazing race took the Gospel of Freedom, the "Gospel of God's Grace" (Acts 20:24) to many parts of the world, and because of his single-minded determination, the Christian church grew to become a world-changing and civilization-enhancing church. This great race was run against the backdrop of great conflict, but Paul endured to the end by training like a marathon runner (2 Timothy 3:10). Patiently, consistently, stubbornly doing what needed to be done to reach just one more person and to share Christ with just one more household. Only the Messiah's gospel could cause the forces of hopelessness and evil to retreat.

This type of single-minded and sacrificial lifestyle is not the result of personal ambition, arrogant grandstanding, and self-righteous moralism, but rather, it is the result of great love. It is the byproduct of a personal relationship with the Lord. Only in relationship with Christ can the Christian find the strength to be faithful in their mission. Only when convinced that there is no other way, but Christ's way, can the Christian give it all up and commit totally to Christ. Paul did not place himself at the edge of society and made himself a pariah for the sake of the Gospel because he thought that Jesus was just another way to the Father. He believed with absolute conviction that Christ is the ONLY way to the Father. Christ is the truth, the way, and the life! And this conviction came to Paul not in books, although he was well acquainted with the Scriptures, but out of a personal

relationship with Christ. Out of an encounter with the risen Messiah that transformed his entire life forever. That encounter was so powerful that, simply put, there was no way back.

We too are on a race here. The goal of this race for us, as it was for Paul is to know Christ and to make him known to the ends of the world. This is the primary goal. We must enter into relationship with Christ, and we must let that relationship transform our existence. I know that many of us started this race on shaky ground. I know that many of us are still stumbling our way to the finish line. Some of us are barely able to continue in our spiritual journey and the temptation to give up and drop out is very strong. How can we believe God is guiding us where he wants us to be, while we are surrounded by so much pain, hatred, division, polarization, anger, and fear? Many of us are in great emotional and even physical pain and wonder, “What sense does it make to believe in a benevolent God when my life is such a mess? Why should I continue to lead the life of a disciple when I feel so rejected? Why should I deprive myself to lead an ethical life, when it seems like others are having all the fun? How is faith in God going to help me anyway?”

If this is where you are, then congratulations! You are part of the human race, and you are alive. The questions and the doubts are normal and common place. Many of us are tired and the temptation to quit is real. But we must keep on keeping on. We must endure in our faith. There is too much at stake to quit now. There is too much at stake to lose hope. Remember that it is not us who run the race, but Christ in us. We cannot do it alone. We cannot propel ourselves forward on our own strength, we need Christ in our lives. We need that personal encounter that makes all other personal encounters pale in comparison. We need to fall in love once again with the Christ who saved us. And once we fall in love with him again, we will realize that the goal is in sight, the checkered flag is ahead of us, and home base is just around the corner. And Christ, who runs the race with us, will meet us at the finish line, and he will say, “Welcome, blessed of my Father, receive the kingdom prepared for you from the beginning of creation.”

God loves us dearly and will help us cross the finish line in due time. God will carry us in his loving arms if that’s what we need. And, together, we will make it to the other side. We are not alone in our struggles. We are not alone in this fight. Right there on our corner, the Savior of the world awaits to offer us any assistance we may need. So, Let us fight as to win this fight. Let us run as though our lives depend on it. And let us not lose faith. I can see the checkered flag waving. I can almost feel the smell of victory. Soon our struggles will be over, and we will rest in God’s loving arms. Don’t lose hope, we are almost there! Amen.