

Title: Running on Faith

Let us pray.

Most holy, Lord God, St. Paul prayed that he would run the good race, which is also a prayer for us to run the good race and find our reward in the next life; may we always have faith in your redeeming grace this day and always, through Christ Jesus in whom we pray. Amen.

I think we all have seen video of the Running of the Bulls in Pamplona at one time or the other. News media like to show it on their newscasts every year. It is a spectacle of “what were they thinking?” It may also be termed the tryout for Darwin award winner of the year.

Well, this year’s running started yesterday. Until I looked it up yesterday, I didn’t know that the thing runs, so to speak, for eight days. There’s a lot of partying during those eight days. It probably takes a lot of liquid courage.

Yesterday the streets were wet and slick from rain. What could go wrong? There was one goring and three light injuries. Though the humans did have an advantage this time because the wet streets also caused the bulls to slip and fall. It took the winning bull two and half minutes to cross the finish line.

There may be a few crazy people who do this, well, because they are crazy. The runners need a good strategy, good running skills, and a lot of luck. I guess one need only run faster than the other guy. I suppose women also run, but I have never seen one. What does that say about gender differences? The runners must also have a lot of faith that they will do the run unscathed.

Mark continues to say more about faith. After raising Jairus’ daughter, Jesus decides to go back home to Nazareth. His disciples tagged along.

As was his custom, Jesus attended the synagogue service. During that service, he taught. Mark gives us the impression that this is the first time Jesus did this in Nazareth. He taught in other synagogues, but apparently not in Nazareth. It was likely that before his baptism, Jesus not only had no authority in the Nazareth synagogue but he also did not feel he had authority

until after his baptism. This is the first time Jesus went back to Nazareth after his baptism.

Well the people of Nazareth were amazed. They watched Jesus grow up. They saw all the good things Jesus did while growing up and maybe some questionable things as well. Jesus didn't attend any religion schools. Jesus apparently did not study with a rabbi. "He is a carpenter or contractor like his father. He is nothing special. So, where did he get all this?"

They were not quite sure who this Jesus was whom they watched growing up. "This is Mary's son, right? We know his brothers and his sisters. They're nothing special. Who does he think he is coming in here like he owns the place and thinks he is smarter than the rabbis?"

In their society, sons, especially the oldest son, continued the work of the father. Social advancement was very rare and could only happen through marriage, which were all arranged, or through a lucky inheritance. Everyone had a place in the social structure and that place did not change.

Jesus was claiming the honored place of a rabbi and that was beyond his station in life. In general, even in our society, when people make more of themselves than what the social group tolerates, that person is brought down a peg or two or is ostracized. The people of Nazareth were angry with Jesus.

Jesus tells them a proverb. "Prophets are honored, just not in their hometowns and among their families." That probably made them angrier. "Now he thinks he is a prophet to boot!"

Mark says Jesus could do no deeds of power there, with a few exceptions. This affirms the link between faith and Jesus' miracles. When someone is healed, Jesus does not attribute the healing to himself. Jesus attributes the healing to the person's faith. Jesus is the instrument of healing but the actual healing happens through personal faith. Since Nazareth was not a place of faith, Jesus was nearly powerless.

Jesus thought he knew the people of Nazareth. Jesus likely assumed that when he taught in the synagogue, the people would be pleased that one of their own has come with good news. Jesus miscalculated and was

disappointed, even amazed. As far as we know, Jesus never again returned to Nazareth.

Chris Rock talked about his father's medicine cabinet. It had only one thing, Robitussin. Chris Rock said, "When I was a kid, I had to be near death to see a doctor, so my daddy got into the habit of putting Robitussin on everything, and I mean EVERYTHING!"

"Daddy, I got asthma!" "Well here, take some Robitussin!" "Daddy, I got cancer!" "Here, take some Robitussin!" "Daddy, I broke my leg!" "Here, put some Robitussin on it... that's right, let the Robitussin sink in there." Chris Rock's father had faith in Robitussin.

Due to lack of faith, if the good people of Nazareth would not listen to Jesus, then Jesus was going elsewhere. Jesus went out to the surrounding villages where he did not grow up.

Jesus knew that he could not visit every city and village. Jesus knew that the good news could not be delivered by only him. It was time to begin the apostle's training. They need to know what to do after Jesus was gone.

Jesus paired up the twelve and gave them authority over unclean spirits. What is an unclean spirit? I know I always assumed that they were demons. If that is true why didn't Mark say demons? In the Bible and Jewish writings, unclean spirits and demons like to inhabit the wilderness or desolate places.

Unclean spirits were called dybbuks. Dybbuks are the sprits of people who were not laid to rest and became demonic. In the Old Testament, the distinction seems to be that God created unclean spirits but demons are not from God but are foreign gods.

The apostles are to take nothing but the clothes they are wearing and, of course, their sandals. They are not to pack like they are taking a trip. In other words, they are not to be self-dependent on their trip. They are to be dependent on the gift of hospitality of the villages they visit. They are to take no food or money.

The middle east then and now has a strong culture of hospitality. When a friend or stranger visits you, you are to feed and house them. So, Jesus tells them that they are to stay at the house that offers hospitality and they are not to go from house to house. Maybe Jesus thought they might shop for better accommodations at someone else's house.

Should a particular place not offer hospitality, they are to shake the dust off their feet. This is a visible rebuke that even the village's dust is not fit to cling to the apostle's feet. To not offer hospitality risks being labeled as pariahs.

The apostle's called the people to repentance. This is part of Jesus' and John the Baptist's preaching. Repent for the kingdom of God has come. Of course, Jesus represents the kingdom of God. To accept the kingdom of God requires purity. It requires people to be clean. It requires that the unclean spirits be exorcized.

And so, the apostle's cast out many demons. They anointed sick people with olive oil and cured them. To be anointed with oil was a setting apart ritual. In this case, it was setting apart the sick from the sickness.

Jesus was unable to cure the people of Nazareth because of their lack of faith. The apostle's cured people, so people must have had faith in them. Maybe Jesus sent them out to the surrounding villages of Nazareth so that Jesus could just get out of the way and let others carry on his mission, which, of course, happened after the ascension.

Have you discovered that accomplishing something is easier when you have faith in yourself and/or the others who you work with you than if you had no faith in the successful completion? In this case, having faith is also having a positive outlook.

Not many people find success if they think they will fail. It is like a baseball player who goes up to bat thinking, "I'm just going to strike out." It ends up being a self-fulfilling prophecy. Nobody runs with the bulls thinking they will get gored.

Faith in God is an eternal faith. The promise of everlasting life was given to us by Jesus. I don't know how this works, but is faith a factor in what

happens after we die? These stories would imply that it does. However, I also believe that God's love for us is more than we can understand and knows no boundary between this life and the next.

In addition, faith, I think, is essential to a healthy life. A lack of faith in anything is an empty life. Faith allows us to have life and have life abundantly in this life and also the next.

Text: **Mark 6:1–13** (NRSV)

6 He left that place and came to his hometown, and his disciples followed him. ² On the sabbath he began to teach in the synagogue, and many who heard him were astounded. They said, “Where did this man get all this? What is this wisdom that has been given to him? What deeds of power are being done by his hands! ³ Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary^a and brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon, and are not his sisters here with us?” And they took offense^b at him. ⁴ Then Jesus said to them, “Prophets are not without honor, except in their hometown, and among their own kin, and in their own house.” ⁵ And he could do no deed of power there, except that he laid his hands on a few sick people and cured them. ⁶ And he was amazed at their unbelief.

Then he went about among the villages teaching. ⁷ He called the twelve and began to send them out two by two, and gave them authority over the unclean spirits. ⁸ He ordered them to take nothing for their journey except a staff; no bread, no bag, no money in their belts; ⁹ but to wear sandals and not to put on two tunics. ¹⁰ He said to them, “Wherever you enter a house, stay there until you leave the place. ¹¹ If any place will not welcome you and they refuse to hear you, as you leave, shake off the dust that is on your feet as a testimony against them.” ¹² So they went out and proclaimed that all should repent. ¹³ They cast out many demons, and anointed with oil many who were sick and cured them. ¹

^a Other ancient authorities read *son of the carpenter and of Mary*;

^b Or *stumbled*

¹ [The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version](#). (1989). (Mk 6:1–13). Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers.