

# ENDURE

## SCRIPTURE

Hebrews 12:1–2

## HYMN

“Fight the Good Fight” (LSB 664: 2–3)

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, Amen.

Have any of you ever run a race? Maybe you have run a 5K race, or maybe you’ve seen a parent, family member or friend run a long race, like a marathon. If you’ve ever run a race, chances are you’ve gotten tired at the end. Your legs start to ache, your mouth longs for water — you get the picture.

In Hebrews 12:1–2, our text for National Lutheran Schools Week, the author of Hebrews uses this imagery of running a race when it comes to our life in Christ. Now, this isn’t just any type of race. The races mentioned earlier (5Ks, marathons, etc.) all have one clear winner who earns a medal for getting first. But the kind of race being described in Hebrews 12 is more like a race where you measure how fast you can run — “Let’s see if I can run a mile in seven minutes.” And the beautiful thing is that there’s not simply just one winner — multiple people are able to run this race and win by making the mark.

The author of Hebrews encourages his readers (and us) to run this race with *endurance*. But what does that even mean, “to endure?” When preparing to run a race, athletes may go to the gym early in the morning, or they might go on long runs to help their body get used to running a good pace, as well as preparing for stresses and obstacles that they might face. Endurance in the race means that nothing will stop you from reaching the mark. No matter how difficult the course is, no matter how tired you may feel, no matter what distractions are thrown your way, you will endure all of these things so you can finish the race.

But what about running this race with respect to faith? How do you “endure” as a Christian?

The author of Hebrews gives us the answer right here: by fixing our eyes on Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith. Our “endurance” in this faith isn’t about anything we do ourselves — it’s all about what Christ does for us and the gifts He freely gives us. As we read, Christ is even the author of the race set before us — there is nothing set before you that He doesn’t know about or hasn’t experienced Himself.

Yet the world will try to distract you from running this race. Sin is always at hand. It is a great weight that cripples us. What are some of those things that can be obstacles for us? Not listening to your parents or other authorities, refusing to help your classmates, gossiping about others, being jealous of what others receive, lying to avoid getting in trouble, not wanting to go to church to hear about Jesus and receive His gifts. If we are honest with ourselves, we realize that there have been many things in this world (maybe tragedies, maybe even successes) that we have looked to and focused on instead of Jesus. We have all fallen short of what God expects of us. None of us deserve to finish this race, let alone run it. Instead, we deserve to be disqualified, separated from God for eternity.

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ, thanks be to God that He doesn’t give us what we deserve. This is exactly why Jesus came into our world. Jesus came to run the race in our place — He is the one who endured all things *for you*. Be assured that there is nothing this day that you face, no matter how dark, scary or hopeless it seems, that Christ hasn’t faced Himself. Christ endured all, even dying a horrific death on a cross, because of His love for you. Because Christ loves you so much, He *joyfully* endured all of these things, because He knew how this race would end. He knew that in finishing the race, He won for you forgiveness of sins, life and salvation. Now, Christ is seated at the right hand of the Father, the victory is won, and He is with you in the ways that He has promised: in His Word and in His Sacraments.

Yet we are still running this race today. We haven't reached the finish line yet. Know this, dear friends: you are not alone, no matter what obstacles you may face in this world. Be comforted today that your endurance doesn't depend on you; endurance is all about Christ. In this life, you will be given more than you can handle on your own. The obstacles will be too great, the trials too strong. If it was up to us, we'd give up and quit.

So then, what do we do? Remember the saints who faced trials that were too much for them? The prophet Elijah is one such saint. When he was in despair, Elijah was told that the journey was too great for him, and the Lord provided him with food and nourishment so that he could endure (1 Kings 19:7). Christ does the same with you today. He invites you to fix your eyes on Him. He has promised to give you everything you need for both body and soul. "What if I lose my best friend?" Fix your eyes on Jesus. "What if my brother doesn't get better from his sickness?" Fix your eyes on Jesus. "What if my parents keep on fighting at night?" Fix your eyes on Jesus.

Bring all of your worries and all of your joys to Jesus, who inclines His ears to your every cry. Know this day that Jesus loves you so much, more than you can possibly imagine. He invites you to come to His holy house, the church, every week to receive His gifts: His Word, His absolution as you unload to Him the weight of your sins, His Baptism, that makes You His dear child. His gifts are the source of your endurance.

What's more, it is here, in His holy house, in the Divine Service, where the angels and archangels — indeed, the entire company of heaven — gather together at the Lord's feast. Whenever you sing with your parents, guardians, family and friends gathered here physically in church, your voice joins with millions of others — the great cloud of witnesses — all of the faithful who now rest from their labors in Christ Jesus. You sing with all of the saints that have endured the trials and temptations of this life and have finished the race in Christ. Yes, these include saints like Elijah, Adam and Eve, King David, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, the writer of Hebrews, and, closer to home, loved ones of yours who have died in the faith — perhaps a grandma or grandpa, aunt or uncle, or even a mom, dad, baby sister or baby brother. All of these are included in this great cloud of witnesses, with whom you share eternal life.

Be of good cheer today, dearly beloved, because Christ gives you His endless gifts to endure the race that has been set before you, a race that ends with eternal salvation in Christ your Savior.

