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Text: 2 Timothy 2:1-13   
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Setting: Our Redeemer Lutheran Church

Do what you have to do

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ; A soldier, an athlete, a farmer. Out of these three, I identify most with the athlete.

Today is the 36th annual Lakefront Marathon in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. At this very moment, thousands of runners are running the course that passes through my alma mater Concordia University Wisconsin, located on the shorefront of Lake Michigan and through the University of Wisconsin Milwaukee campus. I’ve run the race three times. Each training season I have put in more work than the last, and my results show it. I have improved my time running the 26.22-mile course. If you want to finish the race, a spring, summer and fall, full of work that lie ahead of you as your feet carry you across the paths, sidewalks, and treadmills as you prepare for that day. Pain is a normal part of the training on the longer runs, and no matter how hard one tries, the last miles of the race hurt. There are many rules you have to follow so that you can race. A few that come to mind are: you must stay on the course, you can’t push a stroller, you can’t have friends ride along with a bike, you can’t bring your dog. There are even more rules than that, the point is, you follow the rules or you are disqualified. You have to put in the work to get the results that you want. You do what you have to do.

Paul gives us three examples of people in their perspective vocations doing what their job entails. They are doing what they have to do. We’ve already heard about the athlete and what the parameters are for being involved in one particular sport. We now look towards another example, one of a soldier. A soldier follows the orders given to them by their commanding officer. They follow the command, regardless of what suffering they will endure from that command. When your commanding officer tells you to charge head long into the firefight you go. You do what you have to do.

Another example is of a farmer. As we are now in the midst of harvest we can think of the farmer. We can think of the farmer down at the farmers market with their crop. It would make sense that after all the work of seeding, growing and harvesting, the farmer uses the first of the crop at their own table before bringing the rest to the farmer’s market. You do what you have to do.

Paul gives these examples of what it means to Timothy to complete the task that he had been given. Paul gave examples in which the person was told to ‘do what you have to do.’ A soldier follows the order regardless of the suffering involved. The athlete puts in the work to do the best they can, regardless of the hurt of training and according to the rules. The farmer should receive the first fruits of his work.

These things make sense to us. There are certain consequences, both rewards and punishment for actions. Paul is showing us the natural consequences for actions. Being a Christian does not mean that you will be given a cushy lifestyle. If that were the case, then Paul would be writing to us from a mansion instead of a prison cell. Sometimes we as Christians think that following Christ means that life will be a walk in the park. But as we heard a few weeks ago, Christ says in Luke 14:27, “Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple.”

Sometimes we choose not to bear the cross that we are given. We don’t want to share who Christ is and what he has done in our lives. When talking to people, perhaps the point that you are a Christian doesn’t come up. That is not a detail of your life that you want to share with others as quickly as where you live, your occupation, the latest trip that you are taking. Do we sometimes let what the world thinks of us as Christians, delegate how we conduct ourselves in the world? We are not able to stick to the rules of the race of life, the orders of our commanding officer, and we don’t put in the work that a farmer does when sowing the seeds of faith. We put up walls so that we don’t have to share our faith. Meanwhile, even as Paul was in prison, he was spreading the good news of the Gospel to the world.

How much, how much immeasurably more, are we able to do, not being bond and in chains as Paul was. As Paul states, “Remember Christ Jesus, risen from the dead, the offspring of David, as preached in my gospel, for which I am suffering, bound with chains as a criminal. But the Word of God is not bound! Therefore, I endure everything for the sake of the elect, that they also may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory.” ~2 Tim. 2:8-10

Yet, not matter how much we try, we fail in our attempt to follow Jesus the way that he did all things. But thanks be to God for what Christ did and endured for us.

As a soldier follows the orders of their commanding officer, Christ followed the will of God the Father, regardless of the suffering that was involved, even to the point of giving His life for us. Jesus did what he had to do.

As an athlete plays by the rules to be the champion, Christ fulfilled the Law perfectly for us, though tempted by Satan to divert off the course, He stayed the course for you and for me. Jesus did what He had to do.

As a farmer works hard for his crop to grow. To grow within the earth and burst forth above ground with new life. Christ was buried after his death upon the cross. He burst forth from the tomb risen for you and for me, giving us new life with Him. Jesus did what he had to do. We do what we have to do, but as Christians we now do what we GET to do.

“The saying is trustworthy, for: If we have died with him, we will also live with him;” ~2 Tim. 2:11 So what does this mean for our lives now? What are we to do? If you have a coworker that seems to be having a tough day, share the love of Christ with them. We do what we GET to do. When asked what you believe you respond and say: “I believe in God the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth….” And proceed to share your faith through the words of the Apostles Creed. These are things we don’t have to do, but things that we GET to do. In Christ’s name. Amen

"Now to Him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine... to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever! Amen."~Ephesians 3:20-21