

1 Kings 11:3
“Finish”
Palm Sunday

April 9, 2017
Our Redeemer Lutheran Church
Rev. Brent Hartwig

Grace, Mercy, and Peace be unto you from Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior and God our Heavenly Father. Amen! Dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

[Introduction] You’ve heard the old saying...

It’s easy as pie to begin— it’s tougher than nails to finish.
That is what I think about running.

Believe it or not, I was a runner.

In high school I ran 3-5 miles, 5 days a week.

In my late twenties, I started running again.

I worked my way up to 7 miles a day,
And began to think about running a marathon, a Disney marathon.

When it comes to running...

It’s easy as pie to begin— it’s tougher than nails to finish.
Somewhere on the course... ZAP you’re done!

This weekend we have ten Confirmands!

You are a confirmand once, and Solomon was too!

[Old Testament]

Confirmed or anointed by Zadok – Solomon was king of Israel,

And it all happened at the Gihon Spring,

Solomon came out of the starting blocks like a greyhound after jackrabbits.

All the money was on Solomon, this the 10th of David’s 17 sons.

In 1 Kings 3:7 he calls himself a NAAR--a kid, ...

but we would say Solomon was a kid wonder.

He spoke 3,000 proverbs and his songs numbered 1,005.

He gained control of two main international trading routes—

the Via Maris along the Mediterranean Coast and

the King’s Highway that connected Egypt in the south

with Damascus and the Euphrates River in the north.

The result was 1 Kings 4:25: “From Dan to Beersheba,

Judah and Israel lived in safety,

each man under his own vine and fig tree.”

Solomon needed no lessons in the ten commandments or the Lord’s Prayer,

no quizzes on Old Testament or New Testament,

no sermon summaries ... no confirmation points.

If there was ever a sure-fire candidate for Confirmation it was Solomon!
For the first ten chapters of 1 Kings he's awesome!
But in the 11th chapter of 1 Kings our text says,
"Solomon had seven hundred wives of royal birth ZAP
and three hundred concubines, ZAP
and his wives led him astray." ZAP

[*Bugs*] ZAP, ZAP, ZAP! It was the sound of bugs, bugs hitting a bug zapper.
A light attracts them, they fly in and get ... ZAPPED.

You'd think bugs would see the tray littered with impulsive bugs.
You'd think some bug would say,
"Wait a minute, I'm not going to blindly follow my desires toward that light."

But you know what? Bugs don't do that.
And you know what? Neither does Solomon.

Forgetting the words of his father David, "*Yahweh is my light and my salvation*" ...
Solomon flies toward other lights, 1,000 to be exact. As a result ... ZAP.

The text says "His wives turned his heart."
ZAP goes the kingdom!
ZAP goes Solomon in all his glory!
ZAP goes confirmation vows

[*Beginnings*] *It's easy as pie to begin--it's tougher than nails to finish.*
We're great at beginning!

Unbridled enthusiasm, high energy, a never-say-die spirit.
Like hot knives into butter,
we tear into new projects, new classes, new relationships.

That is how the confirmands were in 6th grade.
"Let's go all the way back to the beginning!"
And they would shout, *"Yeah! Yeah! Yeah!"*

But as time goes on, we get weary, fatigued, impatient, and ZAP!
Not another sermon summary!
"It's a bore, a snore, a chore" ... until we say, "NO MORE!"
Thanks be to God Confirmation is here! Thanks be to God because it's the end.

[Different Lights]

Or so we pretend confirmation is the end...

We zoom toward different lights, dazzling lights, deadly lights, at least 1,000 of them.

Lights of pride, power, position, prestige, prominence.

Then ZAP goes the joy of our salvation.

ZAP goes passion for the lost.

ZAP goes zeal for the Word.

ZAP goes our Confirmation vows.

Without our realizing it we fly toward godless lights and

suddenly find ourselves lying in a tray littered with dead bugs.

Today you are being confirmed or remembering your Confirmation.

When you said you would not fall away even unto death.

But Solomon fell away and so have, so will you.

[Jesus] So hear: Matthew 12:42—"One greater than Solomon is here."

This King was also surrounded by lucrative lights.

He began strong ... and he finished strong ... and for him it was tougher than nails.

LITERALLY

Because in addition to the nails,

there was scourging, spitting, slapping, sweating,

beating, bleeding ... and crowning ... with thorns.

Still, he finished ...

in spite of his disciple's kiss of betrayal,

in spite of his friends running for cover,

in spite of his countrymen clamoring for his death,

in spite of his Father's abandonment.

Look. Listen. The sky is dark. The other two are moaning.

There he is, taking a deep breath and speaking his last word.

John 19:30 records it: "Tetelestai--it is finished!"

The veil torn. The blood poured.

The sacrifice completed.

Death defeated. Paradise restored.

So today, just now, lackluster finishers like you and me get no ZAP from "on high."

Instead, a Father's welcome. A Shepherd's embrace. A Friend's infinite love.

If the life of Solomon, David's great Son goes to show that it's easy as pie to begin,	then the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, David's greatest Son, proves that though it was tougher than nails...
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He finished ... for you ... for me.

[Cloud of Witnesses]

But we still have the marathon!

And when it comes to running...

It's easy as pie to begin— it's tougher than nails to finish.

And we are still running.

Done with Confirmation...	you are still running.
Been baptized...	you are still running.
Completed high school, college...	you are still running.
Found the love of your life, got married...	you are still running.
Raised your family...	you are still running.
Completed your career, enjoying retirement...	you are still running.

We are all STILL beginning this marathon course...

So fellow beginners ... ***“Since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us run with endurance the race marked out for us. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the Beginner and Finisher of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.”***

In this cloud of witnesses is Moses ... Moses who said no five times to God... but he finished strong.

At the end, Deut. 34:7-- ***“Moses was 120 years old when he died, yet his eyes were not weak nor his strength gone.”***

In this cloud is Joshua surrounded by ten spies who needed a checkup from the neck up, whose first job was a 40-year stint in the Sinai desert, but he finished strong.

At the end, Joshua 24:15 – ***“Chose this day whom you will serve ... As for me and my house we will serve Yahweh.”***

And in this cloud is Paul who

- five times received from the Jews forty lashes minus one
- three times was beaten with rods
- once was stoned
- three times shipwrecked
- and spent a night and a day in the open sea.

In the dark, dank, deadly Prison in Rome Paul finished strong.

“I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith.” (2 Tim. 4:7)

In this cloud are your parents, grandparents, and great-grandparents.

In this cloud are your classmates.

In this cloud is me... your pastor.

The entire cloud of witnesses demonstrates that
in the fight between the stream and the rock,
the stream always wins
not through strength, but through endurance.

Finishing strong doesn't mean finishing first—
it doesn't mean finishing without blood, sweat and tears.

Finishing strong means daily “fixing our eyes on the world’s only true Light, Jesus Christ, whose Word and Sacraments empower and guarantee that “he who began a good work in you, will finish it on the day of Christ Jesus.”

So back the Bible studies and the sermon summaries.

Back to memorizing Bible verses and studying the Small Catechism.

Back at it again as a class. Seriously... this week you have the prayer walk.

It's easy as pie to begin--it's tougher than nails to finish. But finish!

This is what I want... no this is what God wants for you... for the confirmands... for all of you.
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,
for ever and ever! AMEN!
