

Philippians 3:13b–14

May 19, 2019

“Keep Your Eye on the Goal”

Our Redeemer Lutheran Church

5<sup>th</sup> Sunday af. Easter

Pastor Hartwig

Grace, mercy, and peace from God, our Heavenly Father, and Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior. Amen! Dear brothers and sisters in Christ –

**[Introduction]**

“But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus” (Phil 3:13b–14).

Each spring, as other sports wind down, the oldest of sports is renewed. TRACK.  
This is the image that the Apostle Paul used  
to illustrate his quest for the Christ-like life.

And he used one of the most common coaching techniques in virtually any sport:  
“Keep your eye on the goal (rim, ball, finish line)!”

SURE! Popular team sports still draw the crowds,  
but the striving and attaining of individuals draws something out of the spectators  
—enthusiasm, admiration, patriotism, and inspiration.

**[Story]**

This is especially true for Olympic competitors.

Some may remember that the Academy Award for the Best Picture of 1982  
went to the film *Chariots of Fire*.

It had more going for it than the vote of the Academy.  
It had more going for it than a great musical score.  
It had more going for it than the popularity of the Olympic Games.  
It was a true account of a man  
who, like the Apostle Paul, ran toward the Christ-like life.

The movie chronicled the events that led to Eric Liddell’s  
refusal to run on a Sunday in the 1924 Olympic Games  
and his subsequent victory in the 400 meters.

For Liddell, Sunday was the Lord’s Day, a day on which to honor God.  
It was not a day to run—even in the Olympics.  
The entire Liddell story is more fascinating and inspiring  
than “Hollywood” managed to communicate.

The biography of Eric Liddell, *The Flying Scotsman*,  
tells the deeper tale of both the author's astonishment  
and her subject's dedication.

The author admits that she approached her subject with a too-good-to-be-true attitude.  
She approached warily, looking for a pair of clay feet to be revealed.  
She thought that maybe such a strong-minded man  
would have a streak of spiritual pride, a "holier-than-thou" attitude.

But her interviews with those who knew him  
revealed consistently that he really was that good.  
Many called him "Christ-like."

Eric Liddell gave up running to become a missionary to China.  
A brain tumor claimed him at the age of 43.  
Friends who lived with him in China remembered  
that he seemed to get strength and an air of quiet serenity  
from his early morning sessions  
of prayer, meditation, and Bible study.

On the day he died in 1945,  
perhaps the best commentary on his life  
was provided in the private journal of one of Liddell's companions:  
"He wasn't a great leader or an inspired thinker,  
but he knew what he ought to do, and he did it."

Liddell lived his life as he ran the 400, with his eye on the finish line.

**[Epistle]**

In the Epistle lesson, St. Paul reminds us that righteousness does not come to the  
Christian by obeying the Law—it is the gift of God through faith in Christ.

Neither guilt over the past nor worry about the future  
produces the Christ-like life in the present.

Worry never robs tomorrow of its sorrows; it only saps today of its strength.  
Nobody is perfect in this life—not the Apostle Paul, not Eric Liddell,  
not you, and not me—  
but in faith the perfect righteousness of Christ is already ours.

Christ has set us free to run through life  
without the need to look back over our shoulders,  
without judgement against those who run alongside,  
without jealousy for those who are out in front,  
and with our eyes on the goal.

**[Application]**

So ... "Watch where you're going."

Parents say it to their children.

Disgruntled people in line say it to those who bump them.

Coaches say it.

AND St. Paul says it to us.

So ... Where are you going?

The Christ-life is complex,

but it all has corresponding distractions.

We want our words to reflect Christ,

but profanity is as common as air pollution.

We want our minds to be filled with Christ,

but contemporary TV, books, and movies present lifestyles  
that stack sin on top of sin with no remorse and no counter opinion.

We want our eyes to look heavenward,

but the crowds distract us and we focus on greed, pride, envy, lust, and laziness.

We want our hearts to be filled with Christ,

but our coronary arteries  
are clogged with apathy and indifference.

We want our actions to be loving,

but we -- our selfishness -- gets in the way.

When we look at Apostle Paul... Where was his focus?

What do we see from his life, his deeds, his writings?

As a "Pharisee's Pharisee," St. Paul knew the Scriptures.

Eric Liddell started each day with Bible study and prayer, so did the Pharisees.

Through our study of the Scriptures  
the Holy Spirit will empower us and run alongside us.  
You know... for this kind of running  
the Word of God is much better than Wheaties!

As much or more than anyone,  
the Apostle Paul focused on telling the Good News about Jesus to the entire world.  
He proclaimed the Gospel to large audiences and to individuals.  
He was all things to all people that he might save some.

Focus on one group or one person.  
AND Let nothing distract you from telling the Good News about Jesus.

**[Conclusion]**

Think about this fact...  
only in Jesus and the dictionary  
do you find success before work!

Count on Jesus to run alongside.  
He once ran ahead—through death to resurrection.  
AND On your run,  
tell the Good News about Jesus to everyone you see,  
everywhere you go,  
and keep your eye on the goal. Amen

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REJOICE always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances;  
for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. AMEN! (1 Thess. 5:16–18)

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