

March 31, 2021

Lectionary Passages:

Isaiah 50:4-9a

Psalm 70

Hebrews 12:1-3

John 13:21-32



Selected Verses:

Who will contend with me?

Let us stand up together.

Who are my adversaries?

Let them confront me.

It is the Lord God who helps me;

who will declare me guilty? – Isaiah 50: 8-9

But I am poor and needy;

hasten to me, O God!

You are my help and my deliverer;

O Lord, do not delay! – Psalm 70: 5

Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, who for the sake of the joy that was set before him endured the cross, disregarding its shame, and has taken his seat at the right hand of the throne of God. – Hebrews 12: 1-2

When he had gone out, Jesus said, “Now the Son of Man has been glorified, and God has been glorified in him. – John 13: 31

Devotional:

Hebrews 12 is the chapter of the “great cloud of witnesses.” Imagine running a steeple chase in a coliseum. In the stands are all the people who have run the race before you. They know of all the obstacles: the ditches, the water, the fences. They have overcome them and finished the race. Now, they are encouraging you in the race.

If you were running a race, you wouldn't carry extra weight. You would wear the lightest clothing and the swiftest shoes. If you needed food and water, you would grab it off a table as you ran by. The crowds would be cheering you on to do your best. With people running around you, you would strive to finish the race as best you could.

This is the image the writer of Hebrews gives us to faith. When we have faith in Jesus Christ, it is like running the race. There are people that have finished the race of faith and were welcomed into the kingdom of God with the phrase, “well done, good and faithful servant.” They are in the stands cheering you on. Moses is there. Abraham is there. Your faith leaders are there

(teachers, ministers, friends). All are cheering you on to finish the race. And, as you would not carry a burden during a foot race, don't carry the weight of sin in the race of faith. In Jesus Christ, that weight has been lifted.

In fact, Jesus is the first to finish the race. On the cross, he has taken the weight of sin upon himself. On the cross, he has removed the weight from you. In Jesus Christ, you are forgiven. He is the pioneer, the perfecter of the race. Not only that, Jesus is now seated at the right hand on the throne of God. The right hand symbolized the power and will God. Jesus has paved the course of the race, and he is cheering you on.

To pave this course, Jesus willingly went to the cross for you. As the Psalmist states, he is one who will stand and contend with you. When the struggles of life come, he will be there with you helping you overcome. When we face adversaries, either people or events, God will stand with us. When others put us down and rebuke us, God has said we are not guilty. In the cross, our sins are completely forgiven. The burden is lifted.

Judas Iscariot was one who condemned Jesus. One of his closest disciples betrayed him. He went out in the night and was possessed by Satan. Even though he had run some of the race with Jesus, he allowed the darkness, sin and death and Satan himself take him off course. Even so, Jesus finished his race and received the crown of glory. He is our example. As we face the cross, may we see Jesus for who he is—the Son of God, the author and perfecter of the faith.

Prayer:

Have mercy upon us, O God, for sin clings so closely and its burden is great. Because of sin, our hands are at our sides when they should reach out to others; our knees are shaky when we should be standing firm. We are victims of our own misdeeds; we cannot escape sin's weight on our lives. Through Christ's intercession, lift the burden from us, and help us run the race before us in freedom and strength. May we keep our eyes on you, the pioneer and perfecter of the faith. Amen.