



DAILY FAITH PRACTICES

Sunday, October 23-29 (C) – 2 Timothy 4:6-8, 16-18

Focus: *Finishing the Race*

word of life

“I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.” (2 Timothy 4:7 NRSV)

Read 2 Timothy 4:6-8, 16-18

As the letter to Timothy draws to a close, it is evident that this is not a typical correspondence of encouragement for a young Christian. Instead, this is a final letter because death for Paul is pending. Paul (or whoever wrote this letter on behalf of Paul) realizes he will not be released from jail, but instead face a martyr’s death. His time on this earth has come to a conclusion.

1. *What would that have been liked to receive such news from Paul?*
2. *What additional significance do you give to words offered near death?*

Paul lifts up his own life as a model of steadfast faithfulness. “Now you have observed my teaching, my conduct, my aim in life, my faith, my patience, my love, my steadfastness, my persecutions, and suffering the things that happened to me in Antioch, Iconium, and Lystra. What persecutions I endured!” (2 Timothy 3:10-11 NRSV) It was not been an easy path for Paul, but God gave him the strength to persevere.

And now rests the greatest test of his Christian journey. Paul is about to die for the faith, sacrificing his own life for the sake of Christ. “As for me, I am already being poured out as a libation, and the time of my departure has come.” (2 Timothy 4:6 NRSV) Yet, these words are not written out of self-pity or fear. Paul gives his life freely, being poured out as wine or a drink offered to God. Paul’s life in Christ had prepared him for the reality of this outcome.

3. *How does Paul seem to be approaching his own death?*
4. *What images come to mind as you hear of Paul “being poured out as a libation”?*

As Paul speaks of his own death, there is contentment in his reflection. He has not led a perfect or unblemished life, but he has stayed faithful. These words are written from one who persevered, “I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.” (2 Timothy 4:7 NRSV) What more could we hope than at the end of our days, each of us might utter those same words?

5. *What does it mean to have fought the good fight?*
6. *What does it mean to have finished the race?*

Paul was not just faithful during the good times, but he kept the faith when others tried to persuade him to choose an easier life. Like a successful athlete, he completed the race according to the rules. Just as Paul was faithful to God, so God would be faithful to him. “From now on there is reserved for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will give me on that day, and not only to me but also to all who have longed for his appearance.” (2 Timothy 4:8 NRSV)

The race of faith has never been a competition between believers to produce a single gold medal winner. Instead, the crown of righteousness waits all who keep the faith. It is the Lord who rescues and supports. “To him be the glory forever and ever. Amen” (2 Timothy 4:18 NRSV)

7. *What might it feel like to realize our work on this earth is finished?*
8. *What inspires you about this passage from 2nd Timothy?*

Word among us

Saying goodbye is never easy, especially when it comes to someone nearing death. As we sit in vigil with our dying loved one, we savor each conversation and hold on to final words. Sometimes it's not even the words which we remember, but the silence of being in the presence of our beloved.

No one has to tell us that our loved one was not perfect or whole. We know all too well that life is a journey full of twists and turns. Life becomes what we do with the unexpected detours and calamities we face. Life is not just about having good times, but keeping faith in Christ along the way—no matter what comes before us.

Some days all we can utter is “I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.” (2 Timothy 4:7 NRSV) That's all we can say. It's not about being the first to finish the line; it's not about being more fit than others in the race.

Some moments it is about taking a single breath, praising God that there is breath still in our bodies. And then there comes another breath, another step, another day.

1. *How did you fight the good fight last week?*
2. *What will it mean for you personally to have finished the race?*
3. *What are the challenges and joys for you to have kept the faith?*

Preachers often select this passage to be read at funerals. Think back of Christians you have known and who died in faith. Consider how their life was a testimony to the love of God shown in Christ.

4. *Share an example of someone who fought the good fight and kept the faith.*
5. *How does that person inspire you in your own Christian journey?*

faith practice in daily life

Live among God's faithful people

In the waters of baptism we are joined with Christ in his death and his resurrection. We come out of the water as a new creation in Christ and sealed with the Holy Spirit forever. The promise of eternal life is before us. But like the Apostle Paul, our journey on this earth can be filled with obstacles. Some days feel like we are running a marathon through mountains and deserts.

It might be helpful to realize each of us is on a journey filled with pitfalls and challenges. Each of us runs a unique race set before us. It helps to have other believers offering us support and it is a privilege to encourage others on their journey.

6. *What do you hope to do before you finish the race of faith?*

Prayer

Holy One, maker of the universe, give us wisdom to discern the good fight, strength to run the race, and perseverance to keep the faith in Christ Jesus. Amen

last word

Strive to live so you might confess these words as you fall asleep at night,
“I have fought the good fight. I have run the race. I have kept the faith.”

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