

# *“Finish the Race”*

*30th Sunday in Ordinary Time  
2 Timothy 4:6-8, 16-18; Luke 18:9-14*

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*October 23, 2016*

From the Pulpit

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*Prayer for Illumination: Loving God, meet us in this place. Silence in us any voice but your own. Encourage us through the Scriptures and your Word proclaimed for the living out of each of our days. Amen.*

At this year's Summer Olympic Games in Rio, Nikki Hamblin of New Zealand and Abbey D'Agostino of the United States were part of a Tuesday morning heat of the woman's 5000 meters. Just for the record that is 12 ½ times around the Olympic track.

With 4 ½ laps remaining, confusion struck. D'Agostino fell while running amid a pack of athletes, causing her to clip Hamblin, just ahead of her. The pair tumbled. It was an ugly, disappointing mess.

Until something beautiful and uplifting happened. "When I went down, I couldn't figure out why I was on the ground," Hamblin said, "and then there was this hand on my shoulder."

It was D'Agostino who had stopped and was lifting her rival to her feet. "Come on, get up," the American was saying "We have to finish this race."

The problem was that D'Agostino's knee had been battered in the fall. It was badly damaged and looked out of place. As she helped Hamblin it buckled beneath her. The New Zealander then returned the favor, lending physical support, and waiting until D'Agostino was able to move under her own speed, then the pair continued on.

They both finished. Hamblin just 25 seconds in front of D'Agostino. Both times, understandably, were way outside their personal bests. That didn't matter. It could have taken an hour for them to finish and they would still have triumphed as emphatically as any gold medal winner.

Competition is important and entertaining but humanity is more so. Both of the racers know that. That's the Olympic spirit right there.<sup>1</sup>

I'll be honest, I used to run...let's call it a walk-jog. I enjoyed the fresh air, time to clear my head, conversations with God along the way. I ran in a 10K race, once! I remember that runner's high. I had such a kick at that last ½ mile. Now, when the urge to run comes upon me...I usually sit down and wait for the urge to pass....But I know there are some of you who

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.usatoday.com/story/sports/olympics/rio-2016/2016/08/16/abbey-dagostino-falls-but-finishes-5000-on-injured-leg/88821348/>

live for the race. For the competition. For the culmination of long, hard training. And for the chance to cross the finish line, receive a medal and in some cases hit a big gong at the end to celebrate. For many of you, it's the achievement, but that may not be why you race. Maybe **it's about all the companions you encounter along the way.**

A colleague shared a story with me. David Kuhn is a 64 year old grandfather of four, who ran 11,000 miles around the perimeter states of the United States. His motivation came from his 14 year old granddaughter, Kylie, who has cystic fibrosis. His goal was to raise money for Cystic Fibrosis research. This is more impressive because David is legally blind. He said, **“That I am blind, as with the many marathons I run, I cannot do this alone. I will need sighted running/walking guides. Thus, his run can only happen as the result of a team effort.”**<sup>2</sup>

For David, people were always coming up to him wanting to be his guide. **When he couldn't complete the miles on the roadways, he would find a local high school or college track and fill in the miles.** People would come from around the community, and want to run the race with him. He found a

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<sup>2</sup> <https://itsallicando.wordpress.com/about/> Story from Blog post: <http://dancingwiththeword.com/finishing-the-race/>

spirit of competition and camaraderie. He says, “Apparently there is a strong sense of ‘all being in this together.’”

Today, in the passage, we have Paul in his last charge to his apprentice, Timothy. And just before our passage begins, Paul encourages Timothy in his faith by saying, “I solemnly urge you: proclaim the message, be persistent whether the time is favorable or unfavorable; convince, rebuke, and encourage, with the utmost patience in teaching.... Carry out your ministry fully.” (vv.2-5)

Paul goes on saying the more familiar phrase, ““I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.” He encourages Timothy and others to carry on.

Paul speaks in the first person here and there is no arguing that he was speaking for himself as he was deeply aware of the nearness of the end of his own physical life.

**In Paul’s message there is no talk about winning. Only enduring, and enduring for the sake of the Gospel Message in Jesus Christ. Whatever the circumstances, Paul directs our vision to see signs of God’s presence and God’s grace. There’s humility and there is hope in these words for us today.**

Take, Norma Bauerschmidt who was 90 years old when her husband of 67 years died last year. Two days after he died, Norma was diagnosed with endometrial cancer. Her doctor recommended a hysterectomy and chemotherapy. Norma said, **‘Nope, I’m not doing any of that.’** Norma’s son and daughter-in-law, Tim and Ramie, offered her the opportunity to come and live with them. Except there’s a catch. They live in an RV and travel full time. Norma took all of two minutes to decide. **“I’m hitting the road,”** she said. **“Let’s go have some fun. I don’t want to spend another minute in the doctor’s office.”**

Last summer, Norma, Ramie, Tim and their poodle, Ringo, embarked on a yearlong adventure across the United States. Norma had many firsts along the way. She discovered new foods, a hot air balloon ride, her first horseback ride and even getting a pedicure. They documented their trip on Facebook, so family could follow her adventure. The Facebook page was **“Driving Ms. Norma”** and after a few months they gained hundreds of thousands of followers, all around the world.

She used to say **“No,”** to a lot of things, but along this trip she learned to say **“Yes,”** to new and uncomfortable situations. They logged more than 7,000 miles from Michigan to

Yellowstone, the Grand Canyon to Florida and then, on to the Pacific Northwest. All the while living life to the fullest.<sup>3</sup>

Norma died a few weeks ago at the age of 91, having seen more of this country than she could have imagined, experiencing all **the joys that family life and the beauty of God's creation could bring**. Together with her family, she fought the good fight and finished her race, thousands of miles from where it all started.

**Whether it's an Olympic race, or a marathon or a journey** around the country, each leg of the race propels us forward. Our training, our teammate, our internal drive for achievement, or our faith carry us.

Maybe there is another factor. Many of us may never train enough to run a marathon, or travel the country the way David or Norma did. **But I think there's another way to participate in the journey**. Perhaps the most under rated role in any race is that of the spectator.

The power of the spectator is invaluable. The spectators have a keen sense of who is struggling and who needs cheering on the most. The spectators get drawn into the race for that brief

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<sup>3</sup> <http://www.cbsnews.com/news/driving-miss-norma-90-year-old-chooses-adventure-over-cancer-treatment/> and <http://www.npr.org/2016/10/07/497079353/driving-miss-norma-91-year-old-who-hit-the-road-after-cancer-diagnosis-dies>

moment to encourage others on, propelling one further down the course far enough for the next spectator who will seek them out and do the same.

That's the case with the **Nationwide Children's Hospital Columbus Marathon** that passed by these doors last Sunday morning. Lining the 26.2 mile route were family and friends, volunteers and patient **champions from Nationwide Children's Hospital**. Each patient champion is selected as an inspiration given the individual race they have been on. Each champion has a theme and they have a cheering crowd of support. This support network, (the ones who have cheered on their special patient through surgery and treatment and rehabilitation), also cheers for all the racers. Encouraging the first wheelchair racer, the first group of lead runners and the very last participant. These champions are the reason some participants run in the first place.

Isn't that perhaps what Paul reminds us of, in his plea to Timothy and others who will carry on long after he is gone? In **Paul's case, it was a matter of life and death**. The message of carrying the Gospel message forward was of such urgency. Today, the message of the Gospel, **the longing for God's love and grace** is always present. We strive to make this world a **better place because the story of God's love** propels us out into

the world to help others. Somehow we all wind up in the race together. **We're all in this race together.**

First Church—we're in this race. Active on our journey of faith for 164 years in the heart this city, we live out that message of **God's love and grace. We fought for issues of justice decades and decades ago and we continue to do that today. We** proclaim the good news every time we welcome the stranger, or meet her on the streets, or at Faith Mission or in West Franklinton. We are certainly in it for the long haul, don't **you** think?

We are in this together. There are those who have come before us, who have guided and inspired us. There are those who will come after us, who we need to encourage and cheer along their journeys.

As for us—we continue this race. We continue on in our **struggles and our wonderings and our faithful living...but we don't do it alone. There are others beside us cheering us on.** There are others seated around us whom we cheer on, when the going gets rough, when the diagnosis comes, when you lose your job, when you don't get into the graduate program you want, when you don't think that you have useful skills to offer anymore.....there someone is----lifting you up, cheering you

on, putting your arm around their shoulder and carrying you... when you think you **can't take another step**---or go any further. Those in a community of faith can carry you.

So, we will continue this race together –sometimes sprinting, sometimes walking, sometimes limping, sometime being carried by another but we will continue this race together.

**You don't do church alone** – always we are in community – always we do it together. This church – this community of faith – we will continue the race together. Amen.

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