

Hebrews 11-12, selected verses

So Great a Cloud of Witnesses

November 6, 2011

All Saints Sunday

Maple Grove UMC

For the book of Hebrews, the Christian faith is a relay race through the ages:

- Abraham and Sara ran the first leg, setting out from home and bearing a son in their old age.
- Centuries later, Moses picked up the baton and led his people out of slavery and towards the Promised Land.
- The early Christian martyrs ran a course filled with persecution for the cause of Christ.

And now, the writer pauses, and now, the baton is in our hands. The faith is ours to run. Team Jesus is depending on us. As Hebrews has it, “Yet all of these [--Abraham, Moses, the martyrs and saints], though they were commended for their faith, did not receive what was promised, so that they would not, *apart from us*, be made perfect.”

In other words, Abraham and Sarah need *us*. Moses is relying on *us* to keep the faith. Mary and Joseph are waiting on *us* to carry the baton. The whole Christian race has come down to us—to you and to me; everything depends on how faithful we will be, with what determination we will run.

That can be a rather daunting thought--that we have our leg of the race to run and no one can run it for us. It can even leave us feeling a little discouraged, since it seems like the church has farther than ever to go with fewer and fewer people to run. Yes, if we let it, the very thought of all that running can get you down, until you remember that we do not run alone. Look up! says Hebrews. Look all around you. As you serve and pray, as you work and run, the bleachers are full on either side.

- There's Moses right over there, his Ten Commandments still at the heart of our life together.
- And there's Mary, her "yes" to God an inspiration to us still.
- And the apostle Paul is never far away, reminding us that only faith, hope and love really matter after all.
- And look, why, there's Gordon Knight, setting out the luminaries.
- And there's Lois Palmer, playing pinochle with people whose a circle of friends who never failed.
- And if I'm not mistaken that was Katherine and Harold Dawson I saw downstairs setting up for a youth square dance.
- Of course Elinore Patterson is still keeping the office in shape, and you can't see Blanche and Allen Gabriel just now—they're off counting the money. Count high, friends!

- And I'm sure I saw Jack Gallogly shining the floors and Mary Banks greeted me in the lobby. Wasn't that a wonderful hat she had on?
- And there are so many others, more than we could possibly name.
- And always right on up ahead of us is Jesus, showing the way and shining the light.

Now this might sound like just so much sentimentality, except that by the grace of God it's more than that. It's spiritual reality. All of these from Abraham and Sarah to Gordon Lanum and Bill Graessle have run their leg of the race, but now linger to cheer us on. "Therefore," says Hebrews, 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 that race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of our faith."

Sure, with Team Jesus depending on us to step up and run, with the weight of history on our shoulders to keep the church strong, it's easy to feel discouraged and overwhelmed. But you do not run alone. Look up! Look all around you. The bleachers are full on either side—the great cloud of witnesses, cheering us on. Just listen to them! With their help, I believe I can do it—I can get up and run some more. How about you?