# Congregational-Presbyterian Church

 **“A View from the Finish Line”**

**2 Timothy 4:6-8**

 **May 8, 2022**

It was on Mother’s Day in 1994, which that year also happened to be on May 8, that I called my mother. Lauri and I and our sons had recently moved from Boulder, Colorado to Austin, Texas where I was attending seminary. Living in Boulder, where all three of our boys were born, we were only an hour’s drive from my parents. We often spent Mother’s Day together, but this year a phone call would have to do. As usual, she asked me about Lauri and the boys, and how I was doing with my seminary studies. She told me things were good with her and dad, and she was enjoying spending the day with those of my siblings who still lived in the area. We ended the call by affirming our love for one another. Two days later, suddenly and unexpectedly, the Lord took my mother home to live with him. She had reached the finish line appointed for her by God.

We have been reading together some of the letters of Paul, and this morning we come to the last chapter of his second letter to Timothy. In these verses we find Paul considering the finish line of his life. I invite you to join me in 2 Timothy 4:6-8

As for me, my life has already been poured out as an offering to God. The time of my death is near. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, and I have remained faithful. And now the prize awaits me—the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give me on the day of his return. And the prize is not just for me but for all who eagerly look forward to his appearing.

Knowing that he will soon die, Paul uses three phrases which sum up his life’s work as a follower of Jesus Christ. First, he says, “I have fought the good fight.” Notice that Paul doesn’t say, “I have fought *a* good fight,” which would mean that he was evaluating how well he had done. Rather, “I have fought *the* good fight,” the great battle between good and evil that every Christian is called into. It is a battle that has been going on since Satan first tempted Adam and Eve, and it will continue until Christ returns when good will eliminate evil, when light will abolish darkness. Until that day, you and I, like Paul, are in the fight. But, we are not in the fight alone. Christ, who fought that fight when he was on earth is with us in the form of the Holy Spirit, and he equips us for the fight with what Paul illustrates as the armor of God – salvation which is our helmet, faith which is our shield, righteousness which is our breastplate, and the Word of God which is our sword, just to mention a few. Paul looks back on his life in Christ and sees it as having been a tough, hard fight, but at last it is coming to an end. “I have fought the good fight.”

Paul’s second phrase is, “I have finished the race.” The race is the Christian life itself, which is lived moment-by-moment, just as a race is run step-be-step. The question is whether those moments are contributing to reaching the goal of finishing the race still solidly committed to Christ, or whether the way we are running the race is hindering that goal. Are we running in the power of the new life we have in Christ in which we love God and others, or are we moving along with ourselves at the center of our lives?

Third, the apostle says, “I have remained faithful.” God never gave up on me throughout my life – he remained faithful to me. Now, as my life is coming to an end, I can say that I have not given up on God – I remained faithful to him. I may have struggled at times, taken a few detours, found myself wandering off on my own, but my faithful God brought me back every time.

When we gathered as family and friends to memorialize my mother and celebrate her life in the Lord, we spoke of her Christian faith. While I do not remember us using these words from Paul’s letter, they certainly would have appropriately applied to her. All her life that I knew her as her son, she modeled goodness. I went through difficult times growing up as a missionary kid, moving a lot, having to make new friends and even having to learn new languages, but mom was always there helping me to see the good in the midst of pain, and to trust that God was at work in my life even when I couldn’t see it. She fought the good fight.

And, she lived the Christian life with a consistent, daily focus on Christ. She prayed for me and for my dad and my brother and sisters every day. She daily read the Word of God and often spoke with me about it. When I was young she made me go to church, and when I was older and making my own decisions, she encouraged me not to neglect the importance of Christian fellowship. She finished the race.

And, my mother remained faithful. It was not always easy raising five children, all within seven years of each other, having young men and women living in her home while training for the ministry, and with a husband often on the road sharing the gospel. She struggled in ways that I didn’t realize until I was much older, but she never stepped away from what she believed she and my father had been called to by God – a life of faithful ministry dedicated to the faithful God who had sent his Son to die for her sins.

In his eleventh chapter, the writer of Hebrews tells the stories of great men and women of faith who have passed on from this life. Now, in 12:1 he says, “Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a huge crowd of witnesses to the life of faith, let us strip off every weight that slows us down, especially the sin that so easily trips us up. And let us run with endurance the race God has set before us.” The finish line is before each one of us. It may be close or it may still be far off, none of us really knows for sure. At that finish line there is a huge crowd of witnesses to the life of faith cheering us on. At the finish line is my mother, with my father beside her, cheering me on – to keep fighting the good fight against sin, to keep running with a view to joining them at the finish line, to keep faithful to the God who remains faithful to me. And with them, cheering the loudest is Christ himself, urging me on. “C’mon, Steve, you can do it. In my strength, you can do all things. You can fight the good fight; you can finish the race; you can remain faithful.”

Who is waiting for you at your finish line, cheering you on? Who are the people who have gone before you, faithful people who taught you the things of God and modeled for you how to live according to that teaching? One day you and I will join them, and we in turn will cheer on our children and grand-children, our friends and fellow church members, and all who have come to know us as people who fight the good fight, who finish the race, who remain faithful. What a view it will be from the finish line!