

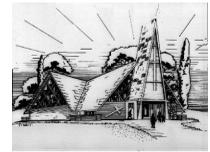


Free Evangelical Lutheran
Synod in South Africa

Sermon for Sunday Septuagesimae 2016

Run in such a way that you may receive!

St. John's Lutheran Parish



Shelly Beach

• The Word of God for this Sermon is written in 1 Cor 9, 24 –10, 5:

- **24** Do you not know that in a *stadium* all the runners compete, but only one receives the prize? *Run in such a way that you may receive.*
- **25** Every athlete exercises self-control in all things. They do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable.
- **26** So I do not run aimlessly; I do not box as one beating the air.
- **27** But I discipline my body and *make it my slave*, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified.
- **ESV 1 Corinthians 10:1** *(For) I want you to know, brothers, that our fathers were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea,*
- **2** and all were baptised into Moses in the cloud and in the sea,
- **3** and all ate the same spiritual food,
- **4** and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank from the spiritual Rock that followed them, and the Rock was Christ.
- **5** Nevertheless, with most of them God was not pleased, for they were overthrown in the wilderness.
- **Let us pray:** *Come Holy Spirit, open our ears, enlighten our minds and help us to control our bodies so that God's sanctification can do its work in us! Amen.*

• **Dear Congregation in Christ!**

- Today we find ourselves in a stadium on the race-track. In fact Paul says that we are all running the race already. He speaks to those who are on the race-track and running already. Now, he is not speaking about our busy-bodiness during the week, our rushing around from here to there and all the way back again etc. Then in a way that has also got something to do with the race he is speaking about. We will see that later.
- Paul is of course speaking about our race leading to eternity. As we are baptised into Christ we are all in His stadium, on His track and running the path Jesus has set us on. So, welcome on the race track to eternity. Let us be grateful to be on this track, because we didn't pay for it. We are not good enough to be on this track. We are not included in the race by merit. By grace alone we are on this track, that we made this team. And what a great price!

•Olympic runners get a gold medal and probably some money and a lot of honour here on earth. All of this perishes soon. But as baptised believers we are running for a prize which is so good and stunning and lasts for ever and for ever... we cannot even imagine the greatness of this prize! Jesus, the head of His runners, made it possible that we may participate in His race to eternity.

•Paul uses this picture of the race, but how does this now apply to our situation as Christians. One thing it cannot mean: That we have to compete against our fellow members and only the strongest and best one will win the prize! That would introduce severe work-righteousness! That would build up the very heresy he battles to root out in all of his letters! It cannot mean this, because he says to *all* of us that we *all* should run in such a way that we receive [24].

•We should not run aimlessly- “yeah, I am on the track, OK, so what, lets see where it takes me”. Rather we should run to receive the prize. Imagine, when you would run to win, in a physical race, from what would you abstain? Could you afford to listen to every desire of your body? When it would get tired, would you say, ‘Ok lets rest a bit’ - if you would want to win the race, you couldn’t pay too much attention to your bodies’ wims. You would have to push through. Even if it would tell you that it was hurting- think of the comrades marathon- you would continue nevertheless, if you would be running to receive the prize! If you would actually be bored and just wanted some fun out of it, then, when your body would tell you, “fun over- pain now”, you would not finish, and never would you win the price. Your body would have conquered you.

•So, what is the Holy Spirit saying here, through Paul, to us as Christians? Against whom is Paul competing here? Answer: ‘I discipline my body, and make it my slave ... so that I myself would not become disqualified!’ Paul fights against his own body, against his Self! If we as Christians become sloppy and indifferent to the fact that we still have the old Adam in us and on us, that could rob us from our price! Their is a very real danger for us, who have received the extremely good and valuable, spiritual gifts of God, that they will be of no benefit for us and others! The problem does not lie with the gifts of God themselves. They are true spiritual gifts.

•The problem lies with allowing our old Self to take control over us. If we give our bodies free reign, the spiritual gifts of God, given to us, could be nullified.

• On the one hand this is true for what we do with the spiritual gifts we have received. What do we do with the Gospel we receive, every Sunday and hopefully every day during our devotion and prayer times? God wants us to be slaves of the Gospel, that is sharing the good news with others in our vocations. He invites us to make use of the Gospel we hear. However, if we would share the Gospel with others and yet our actions in our body would disgust others to abandon the Gospel, we would disqualify ourselves. We wouldn't be unable to proclaim the Gospel to these people, because our actions speak against the very message we proclaim. We would lose their trust.

• If I would make use of my Christian freedom, but in the process this would cause my brother to fall, my body would have won the race over me! The Gospel empowers us, makes us free from our selves, to serve our fellow brothers and sisters. The Law that God preaches to us, deals harshly with this attitude of ***“Life is all about me, deal with it”***. It condemns it. In Baptism this attitude “its all about me” was crucified and buried. That is outdated, out of the question, buried, dead. The very Gospel saves us from this slavery that we always have to do what we want, that we always have to build up our Self.

• We become free to put ourselves in other people's shoes, like Paul did, for the sake of the Gospel, so that they also might become free from being enslaved to their Selves to their bodies. Running in this way would let us receive the prize, namely *to be partakers of the Gospel with all others [9,23]*. If we are partakers of the Gospel, we are partakers of eternal life! Our old body must not be allowed to interfere with the privilege we have to share the Gospel with others in our community, by word and deed.

• On the other hand our race has to do with how we receive the spiritual gifts of God! To address this, Paul reminds us of the generation of Israelites, who were rescued from Egypt, who were baptised under the cloud and in the sea, who ate the spiritual food and drank of the water from the rock, which was Christ! And yet, he writes, with most of them God was not pleased for they were overthrown in the desert. These are examples for us that we should not crave for evil things as they did. Again we should not give our bodies this reign of craving!

• Baptism is more than getting wet with water. The Lord's Supper is much more than eating bread and drinking a bit of wine. If this was all there was to it, even if

one would attach a symbolical meaning to it, it would still just serve our bodies, our desires. If this was all they would be about, they would not truly convey the Gospel, they would not be means of Grace! We would not partake of the Gospel through them.

• But now they are means of God's Grace. And once again, we must not allow our old Adam to rule us when we make use of these gifts. Our old Body will never understand it, will always want to see them only as symbolical at the most. Our mind and bodies cannot understand nor feel or see that these are truly spiritual gifts! This can only be a gift of the Holy Spirit. He must convince us. That is what the Holy Spirit does. He convinces us to trust only in the word of God, which clearly tells us, beyond any doubt whatsoever, that we truly receive highly spiritual gifts, namely the body and blood of Christ! And by eating the bread that we break, we participate in the body of Christ and by drinking the blessed cup, we become partakers of the blood of Christ. We become partakers of the Gospel, in person. We receive the prize of the race.

• Once again, if we would be sloppy with what we would allow our bodies to do with us, we could lose the benefit of these spiritual gifts. In summary we can say that God graciously gives us enormously precious gifts and opportunities to make use of His spiritual gifts. From our side we cannot add to their benefits in any way. Forgiveness of sins, life and salvation. Who can add to that? However, we have to take care of our bodies, that they don't destroy the blessings of God's gifts, for us and for those around us. For this reason it is important how we run the race.

• As you make use of the gifts of God realising and trusting that they give what they promise to you and then share them with others, you participate in the Gospel. The prize is yours!

• Praise be to the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit! **Amen.**

*The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all. **Amen.***