

**TRINITY EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH
MINOCQUA, WI
SERMON FOR APRIL 25-26, 2021**

⁸ But even more than that, I consider everything to be a loss because of what is worth far more: knowing Christ Jesus, my Lord. For his sake, I have lost all things and consider them rubbish, so that I may gain Christ ⁹ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own, which comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness that comes from God by faith. ¹⁰ I do this so that I may know him and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of his sufferings, being conformed to his death, ¹¹ in the hope that in some way I may arrive at the resurrection from the dead.

¹² Not that I have already obtained this or have already reached the goal, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus also took hold of me. ¹³ Brothers, I do not consider myself to have taken hold of it yet, but there is one thing I do: Forgetting the things that are behind and straining toward the things that are ahead, ¹⁴ I press on toward the goal, for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

Imagine you're handed a script of your newborn child's entire life. Better yet, you're given an eraser and five minutes to edit out whatever you want. You read that she will have a learning disability in grade school. Reading, which comes easily for some kids, will be laborious for her. In high school, she will make a great circle of friends, then one of them will die of cancer. After high school, she will get into her preferred college, but while there, she will lose a leg in a car accident. Following that, she will go through a difficult depression. A few years later she'll get a great job, then lose that job in an economic downturn. She'll get married, but then go through the grief of separation.

With this script of your child's life and five minutes to edit it, what would you erase? Wouldn't you want to take out all the stuff that would cause them pain? If you could erase every failure, disappointment, and period of suffering, would that be a good idea? Do you know better than God does what is best for your child? As they run the race of life, what does your child/grandchild need more than anything else? As you continue on your life's journey, what do you need most of all?

Paul uses the analogy of a footrace to describe the Christian life to describe the Christian life, highlighted by this description in v. 13 – ***“Forgetting the things that are behind and straining toward the things that are ahead, I press on toward the goal, for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.”*** What was “behind” Paul? Before he became a Christian, he had tortured and murdered people – innocent people, Christians. He'd caused a lot of pain and done much damage to the cause of Christ. How could he ever get past his past?

There's a question for you and me. How can we ever get past our own past? Certainly, there are successes and high points in life, but sin is there too. The landscape of life is littered with spectacular failures in thoughts/words/deeds not suitable for a family audience. Too often, life resembles rush hour in the big city: stop and go, bumper to bumper, a wreck here and there.

Can we forget the past, get past the past? In Christ, we can. Paul writes, ***“I consider everything to be a loss because of what is worth far more: knowing Christ Jesus, my Lord. For his sake, I have lost all things and consider them rubbish, so that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own, which comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness that comes from God by faith.”*** (vv. 8b,9) The key words: ***“not having a righteousness of my own”*** but ***“the righteousness that comes from God by faith.”*** He goes on in verse 10: ***“I do this so that I may know him and the power of his***

resurrection and the fellowship of his sufferings, being conformed to his death, in the hope that in some way I may arrive at the resurrection from the dead.

Paul isn't iffy about this. He's convinced of this. In his suffering and death, Jesus paid the price for sin. With his resurrection from the dead, he guaranteed the payment for sin as well as our own resurrection from the dead. So from this point on, Paul says – and we say it too – it's forward in Christ. No looking back, except to the cross; instead, keep pressing on!

Paul lays out a blueprint for the Christian life, for getting from here and now to the there and then of heaven. 1) Know Christ. Again, v. 8 - ***"I consider everything to be a loss because of what is worth far more: knowing Christ Jesus, my Lord."*** Christian education has everything to do with this: worship, Bible study, home devotions, Sunday School, confirmation instruction. The opportunity to enroll children/grandchildren in Lutheran Elementary School. Know Christ. Everything else is rubbish/garbage in comparison. Of all the things that matter to you and me, this matters most, because it affects us eternally.

2) Press on. Verse 12 – ***"Not that I have already obtained this or have already reached the goal, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus also took hold of me."*** Notice who took hold of Paul first: Jesus did. He's done the same with you. He's grabbed you in his bear hug of grace and he won't let you go. Our response is to also cling tightly with an active, thriving, growing Christian life.

3) Keep your eye on the goal/finish line. ***"Brothers, I do not consider myself to have taken hold of it yet, but there is one thing I do: Forgetting the things that are behind and straining toward the things that are ahead, I press on toward the goal, for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus."*** (vv. 13-14) Don't get sidetracked. Don't forget who called you, who put you in this race in the first place – your Lord Jesus. Just go, and keep going, by the grace of God, with God's help. Which means we're going to seek God's help and do as the writer to the Hebrews encourages: ***"Let us keep our eyes fixed on Jesus, who is the author of our faith and the one who brings it to its goal."*** (12:2a)

Paul kept going, kept pressing on. He evangelized much of the Roman Empire, multiple missionary journeys, wrote half of the New Testament books. He was never one to just sit back and be content with where he was. He wasn't content to just get by, he wanted to make progress in his Christian life, to make every effort, to excel in Christ.

We can follow his example and take these words to heart. Never sit back and say, "Well, I've arrived. I'm not perfect, but I'm good enough. I'm satisfied with who I am and where I am and how I'm doing. I don't need to make any more progress. From here on out, I'm just coasting." NOT a good idea. Rather, press on by being in the Word, make Christian education a priority for you and your family and for everyone within your reach. This is the one thing needful; the Word of God is the one thing that matters more than anything.

This is the kind of message/topic that seems to call for some motivational music like "Fight the Good Fight" or "Stand Up, Stand up, for Jesus" or "Onward Christian Soldiers." Or maybe rock songs like "Another One Bites the Dust/We Are the Champions."

How about this? (Play clip of "Chariots of Fire") The movie "Chariots of Fire" won Academy Awards for best picture and best music in 1982. It's the story of a man who, like Paul, ran the race of life in a way that glorified Christ. In the 1924 Olympics, Eric Liddell refused to run on Sundays, which kept him out of the 100 meter race because the preliminaries were run on that day. Sunday, Liddell believed, was a day on which to honor God. He did win the 400 meter race and the movie tells the story in dramatic Hollywood fashion.

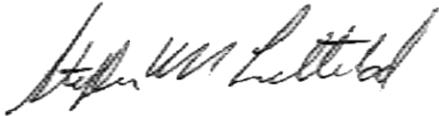
His entire story is even more fascinating and compelling than the movie. Liddell was a humble man, who lacked prejudice toward anyone, and who befriended everyone. After the Olympics, he gave up running to become a missionary to China. A brain tumor ended his life when he was just 43 years old. Friends who lived with him in China remembered that Liddell's tremendous strength and serenity from early morning sessions of prayer, meditation, and Bible study. On the day he died in 1945, one of his companions wrote of Liddell in his

private journal, **“He wasn’t a great leader or an inspired thinker, but he knew what he ought to do and he did it.”**

Eric Liddell lived his life as he ran the 400 – with his eye on the finish line. We too need to live life with our eyes on something, specifically, on Someone. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus. Let us keep our eyes on the prize of heaven. **“Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize. Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last, but we do it to get a crown that will last forever. Therefore I do not run like someone running aimlessly.”** (1 Corinthians 9:24-26a)

People of God, we don’t need the script of what’s going to happen our lives. We don’t need an eraser to take out the bad stuff or to be granted editing power over the various episodes of our lives. We don’t need to know what’s coming because our Lord knows what’s coming and he’s watching out for us. Everything happens and turns out for the good of God’s people. You and I are in God’s hands, and there’s no better place to be.

Press on. Forget what’s behind. Strain forward. Never let up. Never give up. Keep your eyes on the prize. Run the race of life with the strength Christ provides in Word and Sacrament. Christian education isn’t just a catchy term to pull out when we want to sound all smart and intelligent. Christian education – Word and Sacrament is fuel for faith for all ages, all lifelong.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Stephen Luchterhand". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with some loops and flourishes.

Pastor Stephen Luchterhand
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