

McCabe United Methodist Church

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“How Did You Get Here?”

Sermon on Hebrews 12:1-3 (11.05 & 11.06.16)

Pastor Mark Ehrmantraut

Let us pray: Almighty God, We come giving thanks for the faithful servants who have impacted us. May the words of my mouth, and the meditations of each of our hearts, be acceptable in your sight. You alone are our Rock. You alone are our Redeemer. Amen.

- How did you get here?
- Or maybe I should ask: **WHY** are you here this morning?

I have a friend in his 80's. He still talks about the neighbor who came to his farm every Sunday, picked him up, and brought him to church. He was a third grader, 8 years old. The neighbor has long since died, but he can still name the woman who brought him to church every week.

- How did he get there?
- Why was he there?
- His neighbor lady. That's how. That's why.

I know a first grader. For the first time in her life, she's walked through the doors of a church. It's actually right here at McCabe. Someone visited with her parents. They invited her, and they figured out how to get her here. She now loves J.A.M. Jesus And Me, Our Sunday School...

- How did she get here?
- Why is she here?

I know a pastor whose parents brought him to church EVERY Sunday because they knew it was important. And even after he left the church for a decade, he came back because of that foundation.

And God continues to work on him...

- How did he get here?
- How did you get here this morning?

Because of **WHO** are you here seeking Jesus?
Because of **WHO** are you worshipping today?

- Someone in our lives took a risk on us.
- Someone got us here the first time.
- And if you've been here more than once, you came back for a reason.

Here again our reading from Hebrews 12:1-3. The writer is talking about the **Who's** and the **Why's** of why we're here. It's a classic reading to help us hear God speaking about the saints of the Christian faith.

Hebrews Chapter 12, beginning at v. 1:

Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, (Since we have been, and since we are surrounded by the saints who have gone on before us) let us throw off everything that (has the potential to) hinder(s) (Christ's work in us...) and (We're able to throw off) the sin that so easily entangles (us). And (the race that's laid out ahead of us, the path of life God has for us) let us run (it) with perseverance (the race marked out for us).

If you're a runner, you know there's a difference between going for a simple little jog and going on a run with perseverance. With a jog, you might be laughing and talking. You might get a little sidetracked or distracted.

But running the race with perseverance, you won't be second guessing if you've given everything you had. In fact, v.2 continues saying *run this race **2** fixing our eyes on Jesus. (Jesus is) the pioneer and (the) perfecter of faith. (We keep our eyes on Jesus because Jesus initiated and Jesus perfected the faith).*

Instead of the joy waiting for Him, or, sometimes it's interpreted:

*Because of the joy waiting for him, (he) (Jesus) endured the cross. (He) scorning its shame (. When things got the hardest, he embraced the vulgarity of it all. His eyes weren't fixed on the hardship of the cross. His eyes were set **BEYOND** the cross) and now he's sitting down at the right hand of the throne of God.*

Continuing with v. 3

*(He put up with, he endured sinful people doing horrific things to him so that You and I won't grow weary or lose hope). Eyes fixed, running with perseverance, so **YOU WON'T** grow weary, so **YOU WON'T** lose heart.'*

Thank you Jesus!

I'm here, in large part, because of the great cloud of witnesses who had their eyes fixed on Jesus. They persevered in the faith.

- How did you get here?
- WHY are you here this morning?

Some of you may have heard me say that I'm so thankful we have a God of resurrection. We have a God who doesn't shy away from the mess and the muck of life. We actually have a God who enters into it.

And when we fix our eyes BEYOND the mess and the muck, when we press into God's presence, when we set our minds beyond the crosses that life gives us, lives begin to change. Hope returns, and we're able to deal with the struggles of real life.

Turn on the TV. Scroll through your news feed. We're bombarded with mess and muck. Yet this building, this building we're worshipping in right now, this building represents a shining light in our community and our world. Friends, we have the GREATEST news to tell.

I hope you know how much God loves you. God loves each of us so much. Jesus loves the sinners and the saints. God loves us so much that he gave his life. He died on the cross for you and me.

Through Christ, our sins are forgiven.

Through Christ, even those deepest, darkest wounds can begin to heal. For God so loved the world he gave his only Son so that whoever believes in him will not be destroyed.

ANYONE. Anyone, through Jesus Christ, can be restored and live a whole and lasting life.

God didn't send his Son to point an accusing finger telling the world how bad it is. God sent his Son to help. God sent his Son to put the world right again because anyone who trusts in him is set free.

And that's the message the saints who have gone before us lived and shared. And to live faithfully that **MUST** continue to impact us today.

Immediately before this morning's reading, in Hebrews chapter 11, we hear about example after example of the beginning witnesses making up this great cloud of witnesses. These people changed the world one person at a time. In the beginning,

- † Abel brought a great offering to God
- † Noah faithfully built the ark
- † Abraham fixed his eyes and became the father of the nations
- † Sarah, Moses, Miriam, a prostitute named Rahab
- † Gideon, Barak, Samson, Daniel, David, and the Prophets
- † Some were kings, Some died in prison
- † Some were stoned to death, some were sawed in half
- † Some died a ripe old age
- † Mary and Joseph, Mary, and the other Mary
- † Peter, Paul, and James

This great cloud of witnesses continues to build and take shape...

- † Grandmas and Grandpas
- † Moms and Dads
- † Friends, Neighbors, coworkers
- † team mates, a cell mate
- † Biological brothers and sisters, and Brothers and Sisters in Christ

Whomever you might write on that little slip of paper in your bulletin, count them in.

- How did you get here?
- And Why are you here?

I love to stand in the entryway on Saturday nights and Sunday mornings. I love to see future saints greeting one another. I love to see little ones running and wrapping their arms around grandparent's knees. I love to see friend embrace friend. I love to see Mother and Daughter, Father and Son, greet one another, and welcome one another, because we're all here for something bigger than ourselves.

The future great cloud of witnesses, eyes fixed on Jesus, running the race with perseverance and faith.

Pastor Jenny mentioned that little slip of paper in your bulletin. If you haven't written anyone down yet, this might be a good time to do it. If you have written someone down, it's a chance to pray, to thank God for them, and maybe to pray that their impact will continue to live on through you.

Let's pause for a moment of prayer and contemplation...

As we prepare to celebrate Holy Communion, let's continue to make sure our eyes are fixed on Jesus. Let's continue to make sure our minds are set to faithfully run the race ahead of us with perseverance.

Because the question isn't just about who or what has already been. The question is also about **what** is or is yet to be.

Because now it's your turn.

Now it's your turn to give thanks for this great cloud of witnesses.

Now it's your turn to keep YOUR eyes fixed on Jesus and to run the race with perseverance.

Will the next generation, when they think about you and me, will they say that we made a difference in their lives.

Will the next generation put our names on that little slip of paper because we had our eyes fixed on Jesus and because we ran the race with perseverance?

- **How did you get here?**
- **And who are you impacting?**