

Worship for August 14, 2022

Prelude

Welcome and Announcements

\*Call to Worship

What shall we return to the Lord for all the good things God has done for us?

**We will lift up the cup of salvation and call on the name of the Lord.**

\*Hymn 267 Come, Christians, Join to Sing

Prayer of Confession

**Merciful God, you pardon all who truly repent and turn to you.**

**We humbly confess our sins and ask your mercy.**

**We have not loved you with our whole hearts,  
nor have we loved our neighbor as ourselves.**

**We have not done justice, loved kindness, or walked humbly with you.**

**Have mercy on us, O God, in your loving-kindness.**

**In your great compassion,  
cleanse us from sin.**

**Create in us a clean heart, O God,  
and renew a right spirit within us.**

**Do not cast us away from your presence,  
or take your Holy Spirit from us.**

**Restore to us the joy of your salvation  
and sustain in us a bountiful Spirit.**

\*Hymn 698 Take, O Take Me As I Am

Assurance of Forgiveness

Hear the good news!

Who is in a position to condemn?

Only Christ,

and Christ died for us,

Christ rose for us,

Christ reigns in power for us,

Christ prays for us.

Anyone who is in Christ is a new creation.

The old life is gone and a new life has begun.

Know that you are forgiven and be at peace. Amen.

First Reading Psalm 80 Pew Bible p.

## Time With Our Young Disciples

Gospel Reading      Hebrews 11:29-12:2 Pew Bible p.  
Morning Message

At the 2016 Summer Olympic Games in Rio de Janeiro, ten refugee athletes from four countries competed together as the Refugee Olympic Team. Among them were two swimmers, two judokas, a marathoner, and five medium-distance runners.

Ten young women and men who fled their home countries in search of competition. Ten talented athletes who never gave up. Their participation was a tribute to the courage and perseverance of all refugees.

As part of the commitment to aiding potential elite athletes affected by the world refugee crisis, the International Olympic Committee asked National Olympic Committees around the world to identify athletes with the potential to qualify for the Rio Olympic Games. Such candidates would then receive funding from Olympic Solidarity to assist in their preparations and qualification efforts.

Forty-three promising candidates were identified and ten were eventually selected to make up the first-ever refugee team. Serving as a symbol of hope for refugees worldwide and bringing global attention to the refugee crisis, they marched and competed under the Olympic flag.

Their athletic prowess and resilience was a tribute to the courage and determination of all refugees- at a time when the number of people displaced by violence and persecution was at the highest level since World War II.

What an inspiration.

They entered a process with hopes and dreams and I'm sure, not a little anxiety. Did they know exactly what they would encounter? Did they anticipate sacrifices or danger ahead? We don't know. What we do know is that they stepped out on a global stage, trusting in the help of strangers, for a global cause.

It is with that sense of hope that I read this Hebrews text. It's not a very pretty story, is it? It recalls the fates of the faithful, many who suffered and died for the cause of Christ. By word and deed, time and space, the faith was passed on through the villages and towns and across oceans and deserts, and up unforgiving mountains, and into dense dark jungles, until the gospel came to us.

In our text, the author lifts up some of our most courageous heroes and heroines of the faith. If we would go back and read their stories, we would find some unlikely characters for bearing the banner of Christ, and yet, God used them to lead others to freedom, to fight enemies of God and God's people, to find a homeland, and more.

For example, take Gideon. He was an altogether reluctant warrior. He lacked confidence in his own ability and asked the Lord to prove it was really the Lord talking to him at all. (Judges 6:8)

Barak refused to go to battle without Deborah at his side, which you know was not the norm in that day. But, for all his courage, for his willingness to put his life on the line, he learned that at the end of this battle the honor would go to someone else. (Judges 4). And yet he stepped up for God.

Samson may well have been strong in body, but we have to wonder if he weren't a little lacking in his intellect.(Judges 16).

Jephthah, though described as a mighty warrior, essentially traded the life of his only child, his daughter, for a military victory. (Judges 11).

David was the ideal king for the nation of Israel, but he committed adultery and arranged the death of Bathsheba's husband so he could take his place. (2 Samuel 11:1-12, 25).

In Joshua 2, we read the story of Rahab. She was a Canaanite woman living in Jericho. Before the conquest of Jericho, Joshua sends two men as spies to see the land. They come to Rahab's house for lodging. The king, hearing that they are at Rahab's house, demands that she give them up, which would mean certain death. Rahab defies the king and rescues the Israelites. She hides them under the flax drying on her roof, She lets the men out through her window, which is in the town wall. She asks that she and her family be spared once the Israelites attack Jericho. The spies give her a crimson thread to hang from her window, telling her to gather her family and wait inside the house. So long as they stayed inside the house marked with the red thread, they would be spared. And indeed they were.

And for all her courage and ingenuity, we almost always call this woman, "Rahab, the Prostitute." As if her profession rendered her faith defective.

All these characters were less than perfect. That gives me hope and confidence.

Today's problems and challenges are deep and complicated and we wonder if we have the skill or the will or the strength or the intellect to address many of them. Well, the truth is, we don't have the resources to resolve all the world's threats. But, God's people are everywhere across the

globe, lacing up their shoes for whatever race is set before them. We are a cloud of witnesses, going wherever God's Spirit leads.

A few months ago I met Callie, a twenty-seven-year-old immunologist working at Wake Forest Medical School. Callie works long hours and weeks, and is joined by a number of other young laboratory scientists who are investigating childhood diseases. They then build medical models to eradicate the diseases. Callie's from Australia, a home she hasn't seen for over two years, thanks to the pandemic. Still, her spirit is kind and cheerful and sociable, and sometimes, wistful. She misses her family. She misses her home and walks along the near-by beach.

Callie's race has far to go. Kind of like the Marine Corps Marathon. But her life has meaning and quality while she works toward her goal. Her purpose is clear and noble. She has others with whom to share it. She has been a wonderful friend to my daughter and I believe that gift is mutual.

What about your race? What is God setting before you? What is God setting before us? Sometimes we have to just think about the race we will run today and how we will approach it. Maybe that's even too long.

Before I realized I had Covid, I had started out on a grocery trip. When I couldn't push the buggy to the front of the store, I called my husband for help. I was short of breath and close to tears. He came immediately, took over, and sent me home. He finished my race that day.

Those ten Olympic athletes had no country, no funds, no voice, no entry into the premier event for which they had trained. Until people with vision and compassion and courage and strength stepped up to make it happen. The great crowd of witnesses, of which scripture speaks.

As we look toward the goal that is set before us in the near or distant future, we are called to keep our eyes focused on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, who gave his very life that we might live.

I'm no athlete. But, I will lift high his flag, his cross, my whole life long. And I'm hoping you will, too.

\*Affirmation of Faith      The Apostles' Creed p. 35

\*Hymn 581 Gloria Patri

Sharing Our Joys and Concerns  
Pastoral Prayer and the Lord's Prayer

Presenting Our Tithes and Offerings

Offertory

\*Hymn      Doxology

\*Prayer of Dedication

**Blessed are you, God of all creation,  
through your goodness we have these gifts to share.  
Accept and use our offerings for your glory  
and for the service of your kingdom. Amen.**

\*Hymn 846 Fight the Good Fight

\*Blessing

Go now, with your eyes on Jesus,  
the pioneer and perfecter of our faith.  
Lay aside the ways of sin,  
bring forth a harvest of justice and righteousness,  
and run with perseverance the race that is set before us.

**We go in peace to love and serve the Lord. Amen.**

\*Postlude