

GOOD FRIDAY -2018B

Many of us are fans of the Olympics...Right?...Maybe you remember some years ago when a runner named Derek Redmon,...in the middle of his race, tore a ligament in his leg & fell to the ground....The TV cameras showed Derek laying there in agonizing pain as the rest of the runners ran past him...His hopes, his dreams, his years of training, had all collapsed with him...But then, the cameras showed a remarkable scene... Derek struggling to get himself up off the ground,... & on wobbly legs he began slowly making his way around the track...He was determined to finish that race...After going only a few painful yards, .. it was clear that he wasn't going to make it...until a man sprang out of the stands, somehow avoided the security guards, & ran to Derek's side...He put his arm around him, got him up, ..& slowly helped him make his way around the track.It took quite a long time,...but when son & father finally crossed the finish line, the stadium erupted in thundering applause.

For some of us, Derek's story might bring to mind a time when we could've been more like Derek... A time when we could've hung in there; stuck it out 'til the end...but we quit before we reached the finish line.... We failed to finish what we started... Most of the time this happens in relatively little things like: the fix-it project we started but never completed;...the miracle diet that we abandoned after two weeks;... the exercise bike gathering cobwebs in the corner...Sometimes, though, it happens in more important areas of life like: dropping out of school; .. throwing in the towel on our marriage;... taking that drink after weeks of being sober;.. giving up on ever being happy again because the love of our life is gone;...turning away from God when life deals us one big blow after another.

During times like these, we can feel so helpless & hopeless that we're unable to move, unable to act....I've gone thru this...maybe some of you have, or are right now ...When this happens, we quit trying...We go thru the motions. We get up, go to work, we come home,...but we have no energy, no fire, no passion.. We're spiritually & emotionally numb. ...That's when we need to listen to that voice telling us, "Hey! Look! It's not as bad you think!..You're not mortally wounded. You can have a new chance, a new start, a new beginning, a new life...I know the One who can save you. I know the One who can turn it around for you, the One who can heal you...So, don't give up, don't give out, don't give in."...That voice of course is the voice of Jesus....& the One He is talking about is God the Father...

Jesus speaks from experience...Remember, He lived a fully **human** life...He had no Son of God immunity from pain & suffering...John's Gospel shows a Jesus who was totally aware of what lay ahead for Him,...but He didn't quit...He could have...No one would've blamed Him if He had...It wasn't like He was never tempted...During His 40 days in the desert, Satan tempted Him three different times to dump God's plan & to take the easy way to power & glory...Jesus could've quit right there, but He didn't...

And three yrs later in the Garden of Gethsemane, ...Jesus prayed with such intensity that his sweat turned to blood,... asking His Father to spare Him from the horrible suffering & death He knew was coming...He prayed, "Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me;.. yet **not** as I **will**, **but** as you **will**."... He didn't quit,...He carried out His Father's plan to the end.

That's what makes His final words from the cross so powerful... With His last ounce of strength, Jesus drawing His final breath said, "It is finished!"...What was finished?... God's eternal plan for redeeming humankind was finished. Jesus's work as a man on earth was finished. The mission had been completed. The blood had been poured. The sacrifice had been made. The power of sin and death had been conquered. Jesus had stuck it out until the end... And thank God for us that He did.

My friends, we need to remember that a finisher doesn't finish without being wounded & weary...Like Derek the runner, we may come out hobbling and in pain. ...Like our Savior, we may come out beaten & bloody...That's the price for hanging in there, for persevering. ..But the reward is worth it...Apostle Paul encourages us in his letter to the Galatians: "Do not become weary of doing good, for at the proper time you will reap a harvest if you do not give up."...And in his 2nd letter to Timothy, Paul - who had endured great suffering himself – tells his young disciple: "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith."

In the race Paul was talking about,.. it's not important who finishes first...What matters is staying on the track...crossing that finish line...The Good News of Good Friday is – like Derek - we do not have to do it alone...We need only look to the cross, to Jesus, the Great Finisher... ..He finished because He never doubted the love of His Father. ..He never stopped trusting - even in His pain & agony - that God would carry Him thru to the end. ...If we have that same trust in the Father's love, ...then when we are stumbling along,... hobbled by pain or doubt or fear,... & it seems almost impossible to keep going,... our Heavenly Father will step out of the stands,... run out on the track, put His strong arm around us & say, "Hold on...Hold on to Me....We're going to finish this race together."

In a few moments as we come up to touch our hands or lips to the Cross of Christ, let this be our prayer:...”Lord Jesus, give me your strength, your courage, your trust in the Father's love,...so that when the going gets tough, I will fight the good fight...finish the race, ...keep the faith.”

Then, when we come to that final moment, as we are breathing our last,... we can say to God the Father, “It is finished!”...and in that moment we will know – as Jesus did – that for us...it is not really the end...It is just the beginning!. AMEN.