

C.H.U.R.C.H. *It's Who We Are...* Historically Grounded

Hebrews 12:1-2a

Have you ever asked the questions:

- Why is our church a part of a denomination?
- Why "Reformed"... Isn't that name more of a deterrent?
- Why do we recite catechisms/creeds/confessions in worship?
- Why do we read an ancient book, sing old songs, & follow the same liturgy we have for centuries?

Is there value in walking/running in the footsteps of those who have gone before us? To learn from, and apply the wisdom of the ages to our present?

We live in a day where everyone wants to run their own race, do their own thing, believe what they want, blaze their own trail, & be applauded for it!

In Hebrews 12 we see this imagery of a sports arena filled with spectators, runners, & races to be run... But what are we to learn from this imagery?

Can you imagine if the runners in the Olympic games decided to compete however they wanted... to start wherever & whenever they wanted... to adjust the finish line to their liking, & to run the race according to their own desires?

We know that in the sports arena this is not possible... these runners would be disqualified and would forfeit their opportunity to win the prize!

The same holds true in the race of our faith! The Christian faith is not something that we are at liberty to redefine... or make suitable to our own desires!

Did you know that I had a double major in college? I majored in youth ministry and sports ministry! That might seem like a cake major to you...

There is so much in Scripture that speaks to the truth of the gospel and the Christian life, by using the analogy of sports/the arena to do so.

- Galatians 5:7 – "you were running a good race. Who cut in on you and kept you from obeying the truth?"
- 2 Timothy 4:7 – "I have fought the good fight. I have finished the race. I have kept the faith."
- 1 Corinthians 9:24-27 – "Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one receives the prize? So run that you may obtain it. Every athlete exercises self-control in all things. They do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. So I do not run aimlessly; I do not box as one beating the air. But I discipline my body and keep it under control, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified."
- 2 Timothy 2:5 – "If anyone competes as an athlete, he does not receive the victor's crown unless he competes according to the rules."

There are races to be run, both in the arena & in the faith, but in both we are to compete according to how the race is defined & intended to be run!

My daughter ran track for the first time this year. There was much she did not know, & much that I couldn't help her with! Neither of us had run track before, so she didn't have the knowledge, nor did I, of how to run the race!

Thankfully, there are lines on the track that mark where to start/finish/stay in your lane... There is also a coach(es) that are there to teach/instruct... There are other runners who have run these races before to show you how!

In the race of our faith, thankfully, there are also creeds/catechisms/confessions/liturgies... there are pastors/ teachers... there are fellow believers who have gone before us who can help us run our race as well!

The Bible is the most important instrument in this race... but what if we don't know how to use it...? Experience shows us that we need help if we are truly going to succeed in this race called the Christian faith!

This is why we need to be "historically grounded!" Left to ourselves we will disqualify ourselves & forfeit the prize! Let's look a little closer at our text.

I first thought that the "cloud of witnesses" were mere spectators cheering us on in our race, but that is not the case! These "witnesses" are those from chapter 11 – those in the "hall of fame" of the faith! "Therefore..."

"Let us lay aside every weight..." We will not be able to recognize what will inhibit us from running well from the presence of mere spectators? We need fellow runners who have gone before us to help us identify & shed those things!

"and sin which clings so closely..." "There is nothing new under the sun..." The sins of man are common to man... So who better to help us shed our sin than those who have already done so & finished the race, winning the prize?

"Let us run with endurance..." Anyone can sprint the 100m... it takes a whole different mindset to run a marathon! The race of faith is long-distance!

"the race that is set before us..." Faith is not an open road... It is set, it is marked, & it's been traveled many times before by those who've gone before us

"looking to Jesus, the founder & perfecter of our faith..." I don't know about you but I need constant reminders about what the race/goal/finish line truly is...

Creeds, catechisms, confessions, liturgies, hymns/songs, witnesses, Scripture bring me back to what the race of the faith is all about, & how I am to run it!

Philippians 3:14 – "I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus."

Jesus has authored a race for each one of us to run! Though we may run it differently in some ways, with different challenges, different scenery... the course, the starting line, the lanes, the finish line, the prize... it is all the same

May we be grounded in the historical faith so that we can run the race to win!

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- Why _____ Isn't that name more of a deterrent?
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