

**Palm Sunday - April 3 & 4, 2004**  
**St. Mark's Evangelical Lutheran Church - Watertown, WI**

**PRESS ON! Hebrews 12:1-6**

Where are you going? What do you mean? After church? We're going out to eat. We're going home. How many of us keep before us where we are heading? Do we know what our goal and objectives in life are? Many people seem to be wandering aimlessly through life without any idea of where they are, where they are going and why they are even here. That has to be a very frustrating and meaningless existence. Just look at how many people focus most of their attention on having fun or on accumulating money and think that's what it's all about.

Today as we begin one of the most important weeks in the Christian church year, we are reminded of what it's all about. This begins Holy Week. This commemorates the last week of Jesus' public earthly ministry and the week of his arrest, death and burial. Today we remember Palm Sunday, Jesus' triumphant entry into Jerusalem as he presses on to accomplish his mission and purpose for coming into this world. As we remember that historic event in the life of our Savior, the writer of the letter to the Hebrews would have us consider this thought: **PRESS ON!** The years that you and I have on this earth are merely a short trip that we are making on our way to the perfect home that the Lord Jesus has prepared for us. As we make our way through this life we need to do so **I) Undaunted** and **II) Focused**.

**WHERE ARE WE GOING?**

When you go on a vacation or a trip you have a destination that you are heading for. You don't wander aimlessly having no idea where you are going and not knowing if you have arrived or not.

When Jesus entered Jerusalem on that Sunday about 1,970 years ago, he knew where he was going and why. He had told his followers that he was going up to Jerusalem to be handed over to his enemies and to suffer and die. He also told them that three days later he would rise from his grave. Jesus knew his mission and purpose. He had come to this earth to rescue the human race. He had come to satisfy the anger and justice of God against the human race because of our failure to be perfect. Where was Jesus going? He was going to the cross to endure the hell we deserve for our sins. Why was he doing this? Because he loves everyone of us and he wants each of us to be with him forever.

Now where are we going? Each one of us is on our way to eternity. We are traveling through this life to one-day stand before our Creator and Savior. We are on our way to heaven to be with Jesus and with all the saints who have gone before us trusting in Jesus as their Savior and Lord. Is this journey easy? It certainly isn't. In fact, it is difficult. There are many distractions, dangers and detours that we face. That is why God says to us press on undaunted. Don't be discouraged by the difficulties and dangers you will face.

**PRESS ON! UNDAUNTED**

Is our journey easy? No! Just look around you. Look at yourself. You see people wounded, hurting, confused, discouraged and disheartened. This journey is tough. Every one of us struggles with personal pet sins, with temptations that seem to continue to lead us off the road and down a path to sorrow and sadness. Yet we need to continue to move on. As the writer to the Hebrews says, "Since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us." (V. 1) What is this great cloud of witnesses? It is those believers who have gone before us. It is the saints of old whose lives and struggles are recorded for us on the pages of

the Bible. It is the saints from this congregation and every Christian church who have already run the course and finished the race. It is our sainted loved ones who have set us an example by the race they ran.

Then look at Jesus. The writer to the Hebrews says to us, “Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him, endured the cross, scorning its shame and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.” (Vv. 2-3)

Our Savior did not allow the dangers he was about to face lead him off the path. He did not turn around and get out of Jerusalem as fast as possible after Palm Sunday. He stuck around for the rest of the week, knowing that his enemies would finally succeed in putting him to death. Why did he do that? Why didn't he take care of himself and save his own life? Because he loves us. Because that was his mission to suffer and die for us. He knew what was to come and yet he pressed forward undaunted, unafraid. He did not allow the difficulties he was about to face cause him to turn back from his mission.

You and I need to look at that and marvel at what our Savior was willing to do for us. We need to remember that the Lord never promised us that this race would be easy. In fact, Jesus told us, “In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.” (John 16:33b) When we run off the course and go into the ditch, our Savior doesn't allow us to remain off the course. He comes looking for us and puts us back on track. He then doesn't hold against us that we got lost and took the wrong turn. For you see he died and rose for those wrong turns and detours that we have taken. He forgives and forgets all of them. He puts us back on course and then says, “Move forward. I am with you always. Don't be afraid.”

In his great love our Savior also disciplines and corrects us as we run our race. The writer says to us, “In your struggle against sin, you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood. And you have forgotten that word of encouragement that addresses you as sons: ‘My son, do not make light of the Lord's discipline, and do not lose heart when he rebukes you, because the Lord disciplines those he loves, and he punishes everyone he accepts as a son.’” (Vv. 4-5) As we run our race, we have not come to the point where we have been killed for our faith and our devotion to Jesus Christ. Jesus, however, did shed his blood in his battle against sin. He shed his blood for us. But we are often corrected and disciplined by our loving Lord as we run our race. As parents when we are raising our children we often have to correct them verbally and physically. When our child runs out into the street, we don't just stand there and watch them get hit by a car and say, “Well, they'll have to learn the hard way.” We run out there and pick them up and get them out of danger. We do correct them. Well God does the same thing for each of us. He does it in different ways. It may be getting caught in some breaking of the law and having to pay a fine or other consequence. It may be some illnesses, which draws us closer to God and leads us to put more confidence and trust in the Lord. Whatever it is God uses such things to correct and strengthen us in our race through this life to eternity. As we face such things we don't lose heart. As the Apostle Paul once wrote, “inwardly we are being renewed day by day. For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all.” Through all this God is helping us to stay focused.

### **PRESS ON! FOCUSED**

There are so many distractions that can lead us down the wrong road. We need to stay focused. Jesus kept his focus. He never lost sight of why he was here.

Now why are we here? We are here to come to know Jesus Christ as our Savior and Lord. We are here to grow in our faith and knowledge of our Lord and Savior. We are here to share Jesus and his love and forgiveness with those God brings into our lives. We are here to develop and use the special talents and gifts that God has personally given to each of us to serve him and others during our race. And we are finally here to fight the good fight of faith and to finish the race and enter eternal life with our Savior Jesus in heaven.

It is not about the kind of car you drive. It is not about the type of house you have. It is not about the amount of money you accumulate. It is not about your fun and entertainment. It is about your relationship with Jesus Christ and serving him and others in this life.

Keep your focus. Remember you are not a permanent resident here. You are a visitor. You are running the race that God has marked out for you to eternity with him in heaven.

Press on. And when you come to the end of your race, you will be able to say with the Apostle Paul, "I have fought the good fight. I have finished the race. I have kept the faith. Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness which the Lord, the Righteous Judge, will award to me on that day - and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing." (2 Timothy 4:7-8) We press on not discouraged and disheartened but focused on the end of our journey - our home in paradise with God.

Amen.