

“Let Faith Arise—Part 4”  
 October 23, 2016  
 Twenty-third Sunday after Pentecost  
 Text: 2 Timothy 4:6-8

Island Heights UMC, Island Heights, NJ

*As for me, I am already being poured out as a libation, and the time of my departure has come.*

*I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.*

*From now on there is reserved for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will give me on that day, and not only to me but also to all who have longed for his appearing.*

### Introduction

Today we arrive at part 4 of our series called “Let Faith Arise.” Our goal in this series is to better understand faith, and for our faith itself to be stirred up. We have learned that faith can do impossible things, even faith the size of a mustard seed. In part 2 we learned that faith is related to healing and by faith we grow in understanding God’s desire to make us whole. And faith, as we learned last week, is nurtured by an ongoing practice of prayer. Today we are focusing on the endurance of faith, and we are looking to a letter from the Apostle Paul to Timothy, his apprentice in ministry. We hear a brief statement near the end of the letter that mentions this aspect of endurance as Paul realizes his ministry, and even his life, is coming to an end. But he knows what awaits him at the finish line.

### Paul’s Completion

It’s a farewell letter. Paul is facing the reality of his own mortality. He knows his time has come. In this letter he charges the young pastor Timothy to always preach the gospel of Jesus Christ—in good times and in bad—and to fully live out his ministry; and through it all to *endure*. It’s a good word to a young disciple.

*But as for me, Paul writes, I am already being poured out as a libation, and the time of my departure has come.*

Poured out as a libation. There’s an ancient word. a libation is defined as “a ritual pouring of a liquid as an offering to a god or spirit, or in memory of those who have *“passed on.”* And this is how Paul sees himself.

So who is this Paul whose letters make up so much of the New Testament?

He was once a persecutor of the people who followed Jesus. He believed they were heretics and blasphemers. He was there when Stephen—a follower of Jesus and firebrand evangelist who preached the good news—was put to death by stoning. Paul held the coats of his executioners. His mission as a devout Pharisee who held to the traditional teachings was to hunt down, capture and imprison anyone who believed Jesus was the Son of the Living God. He was on his way to Damascus to do just that when he was blinded for three days by a bright light as he walked along the road. This was his storied encounter with the risen Christ, which changed his life forever. The book

of Acts gives a detailed biography of his ministry of spreading the news of Jesus Christ far beyond the borders of Palestine; throughout the Mediterranean into what is now Turkey, Greece, and Italy. The Gospel was moving outward, and by the power of the Holy Spirit made available not only to the Jews in Jerusalem, Judea, and all of Samaria, but to the rest of the world; and it was Paul, known as the Apostle to the Gentiles, who was the key player in that development. And he did it through all kinds of peril: trials, imprisonment, punishments including beatings and stonings, he escaped murder attempts and even survived shipwrecks. Paul pushed on through it all, and for the sake of the Gospel never gave up on what he was called to do.

And now, as we see in this letter to Timothy, he is reaching his completion; completion of his ministry, and completion of his life. It is time to pass the baton. But he knows glory is not far off.

### Paul's Triumph of Faith

And now, it's as if Paul is writing his very own epitaph; words that sum up his time on earth. The kind of statement we might, all of us, want on our gravestone. He says,

*"I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith."*

As I mentioned earlier to the kids, I run. I run mostly for my health. But there have been a couple of occasions when I have run competitively. While at my last church I ran the Eatontown 5k for two years in a row. In the second year I ran it in 30 minutes and 56 seconds. Not bad for someone my age, and it landed me somewhere in the middle of the pack of 100 or so runners. But I want to tell you the story of two other people who ran that day. Jon and Susan. Jon is a young dad who is a serious runner; he runs 5k races all the time, and I know him from the pick-up basketball games we play together. I did not know he was entering the race until that day, and I was happy to see him, but intimidated just the same. Susan, another friend of mine is a runner more like the rest of us. We participate, we run, it hurts, and we are fairly certain we are not going to come in first.

Well, Jon ran like the wind. The course is a loop and I saw him heading for the finish before I was even half way through. He was fast and focused. Meanwhile, I had no idea where Susan was. It was a hot September day, and most of us were struggling. There were water stations along the way, but it didn't matter. This was a tough run and I was feeling the pain. What a relief to come around the final corner and see the finish line at the bottom of the hill where Joan and other people from the church were waiting to cheer me on. I made it. I finished the race. And at 30 minutes and 56 seconds it was the fastest I had ever run a 5k.

I soon found out my friend Jon won the race coming in at 17 minutes and 12 seconds. But where was Susan? Nobody from the church had seen her out on the course. The longer we waited, the more concerned we became. When almost everyone moved inside to where the award ceremony was beginning, I went back out on the course to find her. There were no other runners out there, everyone had already finished. I saw Susan about a quarter mile away from the finish, and I don't think I have ever seen anyone move as slow as she was going. The police car a few yards behind

her closing down the course confirmed she was the last person to come in. Her face was beet red and her legs were barely able to move. But she was determined to finish. Even though her steps were slower than when most of us walk, she was not going to quit. I told her there was just one more turn and then it would be downhill to the finish line, and that it be cool if she could run out the last stretch. She looked at me and in all seriousness said, "I am running." She pressed on. She fought the good fight, she kept the faith, and she finished the race.

The only ones left at the finish were the handful of people from our church, who cheered her on as she crossed the line at 57 minutes and 58 seconds. Her happiness at coming in under an hour was unforgettable. For her, this was victory. She made it. She endured. And now, it was time to go inside and celebrate with the others.

### Paul's Reward

To endure in the faith is no small matter. To reach the finish line means everything. To hold on to our determination, to know that we can do it, we must do it is what keeps us going. Paul knows in the end there will be a reward. He knows who is waiting for him at the finish. He tells Timothy,

*"From now on there is reserved for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will give me on that day, and not only to me but also to all who have longed for his appearing."*

These are the words of faith, an enduring faith, a faith born in the hour you first believe and matured over a lifetime longing for the appearing of Jesus Christ. Let *that* faith arise! We can see what is going on. We live in a fallen world. But hear the good news: this world is being redeemed through faith in Jesus Christ.

After the race I saw my friend Jon in the great ballroom where food was being served to all the participants and prizes were being announced. He was just milling about, not sure where to go, he didn't seem to know anybody. So I invited him to our table to join the people from our church. And in a move that only God could orchestrate, Jon and Susan sat next to each other—a profound picture, captured in a brief moment; the first and the last, the alpha and the omega. Both were rewarded that day; one for finishing first, one for simply finishing.

### Our Enduring Mission

So be like Paul. Fight the good fight. Finish the race. Keep the faith. We all run at different speeds. But we are all called to something in this life; you know what you have been called to. Go and do it. Do not be discouraged when knocked down, but get back and keep going. Do not let obstacles stop you; overcome them. Do not allow the pain to keep you from the goal. One day you will see the finish line, do not quit before the race is run all the way to the end. Know that God is with us all the way. God is waiting at the finish line, and God will always rewards us in the end.

Keep that faith. Let that faith arise! Amen.