

**Sunday, June 2, 2019:** Graduation Sunday, Holy Communion

Message: The Race Ahead

Text: "One generation will praise your works to the next one, proclaiming your mighty acts." -Psalm 145:4

Scriptures: 1 Corinthians 9:24-27, Hebrews 12:1-3, 2 Timothy 2:1-2

Blurb: This Sunday is graduation Sunday! We have six high school graduates and one college graduate. Besides celebrating them, this is a time for us to remember our calling to pass on the faith to the next generations. Others have shared Jesus with us. Because of that, we can embrace Him in our lives and experience abundant and eternal life. We, now, in turn, share Jesus with others. Our Christian lives are like a relay race! This Sunday we'll be equipped to run our "leg" of the race!

Children's time: Relay race. -Andrew

Prep: Batons for each student, engraved with a cross, their name, "Graduation 2019", and the verse: "Tell the next generation." -Psalm 78:4

Quilts from the quilters

Books for each graduate

Cards for each graduate

**Call to Worship:** *Hope Has a Name* -Sanctify

**Welcome:** -Pastor David

Introduction

Love.Grow.Serve.

**Memory Verse:**

"One generation will praise your works to the next one, proclaiming your mighty acts." - Psalm 145:4

**Worship Music:** - Sanctify

*I Love to Tell the Story*

*Glory to Glory*

*Forever Reign*

Worship Prayer - Andrew

**Grow Moment:** Summer Grow Groups - Video

**Kid's Moment:** *Relay Race* - Pastor Andrew

**Message:** -Pastor David

**PP#1: The Race Ahead**

“One generation will praise your works to the next one, proclaiming your mighty acts.” - Psalm 145:4

The Race Ahead. Psalm 145:4 “One generation will praise your works to the next one, proclaiming your mighty acts.”

**PP#2: *Image of relay team passing on batons, like at Olympics***

Ten years ago, you high school graduates were around eight years old. You were in 4<sup>th</sup> grade. For English, you were learning applied grammar and spelling by crafting your first papers. Math was multi-step word problems and applied fractions...one half times one fourth. Science included life, earth, and physical science, and for English, your first separation of fiction from non-fiction in book reports. History and Social Studies were still together, and you first learned about the American Revolution. And everyone did music...all the same music...remember? Imagine how easy that stuff was, right? Not much for homework, either. How different than this past year, right? Fourth graders have it so easy, they have no idea!

You know what also happened when you were going into the 4<sup>th</sup> grade? The Olympics in Beijing, China. You might remember a couple of amazing things from that Olympics: Michael Phelps won the most gold medals—and all medals—in history at one Olympics: 8 Swimming Gold Medals! The other is Usain Bolt, who became the fastest man on earth, shattering the 100- and 200-meter world records.

But there was a third, tragic story of the 2009 Olympics that is almost unknown. It was the Men's and Women's 4x100 Relay. The US had dominated this event through the years, and both teams were favored to bring home the Gold again. But for the first time in the history of the modern Olympics, both U.S. teams, Men's and Women's, failed to even make the finals. The reason? In the preliminary heats, each team dropped the baton on their exchanges.

It was unthinkable! Relay races are all about passing on the baton. The athletes were trained, and ready, and fast, but they failed on the most important part of their race, and they didn't qualify.

Back when you were in 4<sup>th</sup> Grade, you were already part of a relay race, too: a spiritual relay race. Your parents, your family, your church family, were all running their spiritual races. As you were growing up, as your family prayed together—perhaps early on just at bedtime and meals—listened to Christian music and speakers, went to worship together, were a part of church stuff together, you slowly became aware of the spiritual race that you were being included into.

**PP#3: 1 Corinthians 9:24-27 (CEB)**

24 Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize. 25 Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last, but we do it to get a crown that will last forever. 26 Therefore I do not run like someone running aimlessly; I do not fight like a boxer beating the air. 27 No, I strike a blow to my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize.

Paul, in 1 Corinthians 9, describes being a disciple of Jesus as a runner in the Olympic games. Let's look at that, starting with verse 24. Paul says, “Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize.” You see, Christians

aren't just in a race, just trying to make progress: we're running with a purpose. That's different, isn't it? Sometimes we get a bit lazy. "Well, we'll just give it a shot. We'll keep moving at least. But hey, I'm ahead of that guy!" But our eyes are not on who's behind us. We look ahead: pushing, striving, giving our all as we focus on Jesus. Verse 25, "Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last, but we do it to get a crown that will last forever. [The abundant life that we get when we follow Jesus is real now, but also it continues into eternity. 26,] Therefore I do not run like someone running aimlessly; I do not fight like a boxer beating the air [referencing another Olympic sport]. No, I strike a blow to my body [meaning put my body into strict training] and make it my slave [not allowing only what is easy or fun] so that after I have preached to others [my witness, my example], I myself will not be disqualified for the prize."

**PP#4: The Race Ahead**

1. "Run in such a way as to get the prize." -1 Cor. 9:24b

So, graduates—actually, this is for all of us—here is our first question, one that can change your life's course: how is your running? Is it like you're at a track meet and giving it your all? Or is it like you're at the Mall of America, leisurely strolling along, looking at everything around you...tempted by and wanting everything you see? Does your running have a focus, a purpose? The goal of the race is to become more like Jesus. The race itself is the process of becoming like the one we're trying to keep up with, Jesus Christ. He's our pace setter! Are you pushing yourself as a disciple of Jesus, or are you just on the track but kind of taking it easy? Is it about you, and staying comfortable, or is it about living for Jesus, and staying focused? Too often Christians think discipleship is a leisurely stroll. But we're actually running a race! What do you need to do to up your game at this point in your life?

**PP#5: *Image of a relay race, perhaps an areal view of runners handing off the batons.***

But according to the Bible, we are not running a solo race. It is a relay race. This is why we must run our own races the best we can. Others are counting on us. We are being watched by others, who are deciding if they want to join the race, too. Is it worth running? It is a good life? Is living as a disciple of Jesus better than what they're trying to do? Others may come up along side us and keep in step for a bit. And this is where the relay part comes in. We pass along what we have been given.

Jesus is the key to abundant and eternal life. He makes our lives deeply satisfying and fulfilling. Other options and interests, other things that claim to bring happiness and meaning, they may work for a time. But as we keep running, we see those other pleasures eventually fall through. What we carry as we run is what keeps us going, and keeps making us whole. Jesus never fails us! A solo runner only sees the finish line. A relay runner looks to see the other runners, too.

**PP#6: The Race Ahead**

1. "Run in such a way as to get the prize." -1 Cor. 9:24b
2. Run your life as a relay -Psalm 145:4

Here's the second transformational question: are you running a *relay* race? Are you living in such a way where you not only choose to continue to carry Jesus as your prize, but are you running with eyes on others around you, seeking ways to pass on the joy you have?

Church, this is what we are all about. We are called to pass on the baton of faith to others. We cannot get this one wrong! If we drop the baton, like the US Olympics relay teams, we lose the

race which we, as a church, are called to. We must hand it off. We must hand it down to the next generations. This is why we are lifting up our youth here today. It's not that they are great people who have accomplished a lot, even though they are. We are here praying over them today because it is to them that we pass on the faith. We are disciples who make disciples. We have come along side them, and taught them, encouraged them, told them the stories of God. And today we root them on at this key juncture in their lives because now we see them take off on their own leg of the race.

**PP#7:** "One generation will praise your works to the next one, proclaiming your mighty acts." - Psalm 145:4

"We won't hide them from their descendants; we'll tell the next generation all about the praise due the Lord and His strength—the wondrous works God has done. -Psalm 78:4

Psalm 145:4, "One generation will praise your works to the next one, proclaiming your mighty acts." Psalm 78:4, "We won't hide [God's deeds] from their descendants; *we'll tell the next generation* all about the praise due the Lord and His strength—the wondrous works God has done." This is the mission of our church; this is the mission of each disciple of Jesus. This is my mission!

**PP#8:** *Close up image of a runner holding tightly to a baton.*

So, this creates the third life-changing question for us today: have you taken hold of the faith passed on to you? Graduates, remember back to the 4<sup>th</sup> grade? You were learning about math and English and science. But you were also being taught about the most important things in life, things you can't always define or measure. Love, beauty, joy. These are the real things of life, and they are part of our faith in God. You saw them in your parents, in your families, in your church, in those that God has placed in your life. You've experienced God's touch in your own lives. And now, as you graduate, you are beginning the next chapter of your lives, chapters that you must run. Have you taken up the commitment to be a disciple of Jesus? There is nothing more life-changing!

**PP#9:** The Race Ahead

1. "Run in such a way as to get the prize." -1 Cor. 9:24b
2. Run your life as a relay -Psalm 145:4
3. Take up the baton of faith -Hebrews 12:1

There are so many options in this world, so many ideas and paths that claim to offer you the good life. But today, we are here again with you, to remind you that the only good way you can really trust is Jesus. In school, you have completed your chapter of education, but you have more to learn. You know enough to take the next steps, however. And you also have enough of Jesus to take your next steps of faith in boldness and assurance. Commit today to run the race of discipleship!

Or others here today, too: have you taken hold of the faith passed on to you? Have you successfully received the baton of faith? Perhaps you tried, but have dropped it. Did you know that in a relay race, it is perfectly legal to go and pick up a dropped baton? It may set you back some, but you can still run. If you've fumbled your faith, it's okay. Make a point today to pick it up again, and get running. There is still much of the race yet in front of you. We here, today, are cheering you on!

**PP#10:** Hebrews 12:1-3 (CEB)

- 1 So then, since we have such a great cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let's also run the race with endurance that is laid out in front of us. Let's throw off any extra baggage, get rid

of the sin that trips us up, 2 and fix our eyes on Jesus, faith's pioneer and perfecter. He endured the cross, ignoring the shame, for the sake of the joy that was laid out in front of Him, and sat down at the right side of God's throne. 3 Think about the One who endured such opposition from sinners so that you won't be discouraged and you won't give up.

Hebrews 12 says that. Verse 1, "So then, since we have such a great cloud of witnesses surrounding us [those who have passed the baton to us], let's also run the race with endurance that is laid out in front of us. Let's throw off any extra baggage, get rid of the sin that trips us up, and fix our eyes on Jesus, faith's pioneer and perfecter. He endured the cross, ignoring the shame, for the sake of the joy that was laid out in front of Him, and sat down at the right side of God's throne. Think about the One who endured such opposition from sinners so that you won't be discouraged and you won't give up."

Right there: a survival technique for the long hall, when life gets hard, and you start to waver in your faith. Think about how Jesus endured opposition and struggle, so you won't give up!

**PP#11:** *Picture of a whole relay team, all the members together.*

Graduates—and church, too—as your pastor (and dad!) I want to end with a very important, pointed charge to you today. Mark your Christian discipleship with the habit of passing on the faith that you've received. As you graduate, most of what you are hearing is that it's *all about you*. "We celebrate you, we think you're awesome! The world is your oyster, you can do anything you choose! Your whole life is ahead of you, you can make of it whatever you desire. Go and do what you want!"

Well, it's kind of true, I guess, but that's a very selfish perspective we're teaching you. "Keep yourself as the center of your world!" And I want to warn you that although that makes for great graduations speeches and sentiments, it won't carry you very long in life. The reality is that when you put yourself at the center of your world, your world gets very narrow, and selfish, and marked by anxiety and fear as things happen that you can't control, and filled with anger and resentment as you try to cope with disappointment and closed doors, and above all, it's exhausting! You just can't keep it up, keep it all together, and create the success you think you want, doing all that the world demands of those who pursue it's ways.

**PP#12:** The Race Ahead

1. "Run in such a way as to get the prize." -1 Cor. 9:24b
2. Run your life as a relay -Psalm 145:4
3. Take up the baton of faith -Hebrews 12:1
4. Make it your habit to pass on batons -2 Timothy 2:2

Instead, hear this Gospel charge, the Jesus calling for your lives. No matter what you do for career, relationships, hobbies, or your big life decisions, mark all of your life with the habit of passing on your baton of faith. Take the time to nurture your own faith and relationship with God. Take the time to connect with others about faith issues—the real issues of life—like peace, and hope, and meaning, and love. Invest in others. Create a lifestyle where you have capacity to pour into others about what really matters...not just being friends, but sharing with them words of life and hope and joy. Let me tell you: this will bring you far more lasting joy than anything you can achieve or acquire. And, the cool thing is, this will all last beyond your earthly life. It is a lasting investment.

You don't have to do it in your own strength, either! This habit in your life means allowing the Holy Spirit to work in and through you. He will show you your path, and then give you the

strength and boldness to go that way, and then to keep doing it, keep running, for you won't be running just with your own strength.

We disciples [point to self] make disciples [point to graduates] who in turn make disciples [point outward]. Your calling as a follower of Jesus is not just to have Jesus for yourself. It is to have Jesus, whom you in turn share with others. Your life is not ultimately about you! I want to charge you with living the life, opposite of what you will hear everywhere else.

**PP#13:** 2 Timothy 2:1-2 (CEB)

1 So, my child, draw your strength from the grace that is in Christ Jesus. 2 Take the things you heard me say in front of many other witnesses and pass them on to faithful people who are also capable of teaching others.

Paul clearly makes this charge to Timothy, whom he has raised in the faith. Paul has passed his baton of faith to Timothy, and then, as Timothy is graduating into leadership in the church, Paul tells him to keep passing it on. I want you to hear these words as from us to you, graduates! 2 Timothy 2:1-2, "So, my child, draw your strength from the grace that is in Christ Jesus. Take the things you heard me say in front of many other witnesses and pass them on to faithful people who are also capable of teaching others." Disciples making disciples who make disciples.

**PP#14:** *Image of Usain Bolt crossing the finish line, joyous and exuberant.*

Graduates, as you mark this great achievement, I as your pastor and we as your church want to give God thanks for you, to bless you, encourage you, tell you how proud we are of you, tell you again that we love you. But we also want to remind you of, and keep pointing out, the path of abundant life. Since before you were in the 4<sup>th</sup> grade, perhaps since before you were born, we have tried to live our witness in Christ as faithfully as we could—stumbling and tripping at times for sure, maybe dropping the baton now and again, but always going back, picking it up, and focusing again on Jesus. Today, we want to urge you to receive for yourself the baton of faith, to choose Jesus and choose to live for Jesus, carrying the baton of faith into your futures. We hand it off to you! We will continue to be part of your great cloud of witnesses who cheer you on, to run your life's race focused and zealously, and to run it as a relay race. And most pointedly, I want to charge you, as you graduate, to live your race not just for yourself, but as a life of passing on as many batons to others as you can. Now it is your turn to run. With pride and joy and prayers, we commit you to live as a running disciple of Jesus.

Michael Phelps and Usain Bolt have retired. But you—we—will never retire from the race. As long as God keeps us on earth, we run. But one day, Paul also tells Timothy in 2 Timothy 4:7, when we finally see Jesus face to face, we will get to claim the prize, and proclaim, "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith." Amen.

**Grow Moment:** Praying for our graduates.

Introduction of the Graduates:

Okay, so, we want to mark this major milestone in your lives, graduates, by symbolizing our church's purpose of passing on the baton of faith from us as your church to you, and pray for you as we do.

I have as one of our gifts to you, up here, a baton for each of you, with your name on it, marking your graduation, and the verse from Psalm 78:4, "Tell the next generation," to remind you to keep passing it on.

So, I want to invite all our graduates to come up front here, we have six high school graduates, and one college graduate. Come on up and stand across the front the church, on the floor. From left to right, please stand in alphabetically by your first name. That means Emily, you're here on the far left, then Mikayla, then Mila, then Phoebe, then, on the right side of the Communion Table, Rebekah, then Shane, and then our college graduate on the right. Come on up!

We're going to start by asking you to each share with us your name, the school you are graduating from, and then your short-term goals, like, what you are planning to do come fall. We'll start with Emily, so when your image comes up on the screen, that's your turn to go. Okay?

*Graduates:* High school: Emily Masterjohn, Mikayla Whitehill, Mila Mix, Phoebe Karan, Rebekah Werner, Shane Kargel, College: Micah Ison

#### Presentation of Quilts: UMW

Your major gift from your church is a hand-made quilt for you to take with you. We pray it reminds you that you are always wrapped in of the love and care of Jesus and by us your home church who loves you. It's a hand-made work of art, just like you are!

#### Presentation of Books: Cassi

#### Appreciation for Cassi: Nick Masterjohn

#### Passing of the Batons

Now, we want to present you with your batons and pray over you. I'm going to ask at least one parent to come up as a symbol of the faith witness you have received from your family. So, come on up, parents and stand next to your graduate. Deanne, I know you're Micah's mom, but could I ask you to instead go and stand over next to Phoebe? You see, I'm also going to ask a representative of our church to come up and help, too, as a symbol of the faith witness you have received from us.

Micah is our college graduate. Micah, you confirmed your faith in front of this church in May 2010. Do you happen to remember that we selected a special Bible verse for you and your confirmation class? It was Psalm 119:33, which says, "Teach me, O Lord, to follow your decrees; then I will keep them to the end." Today you continue to live into that verse! In the youth group, you spent many hours under the leadership of Sandy Coley. She is going to serve as your church representative today.

Next are our high school graduates. Four of them were in an all-girl confirmation class together, 2015. You each had confirmation mentors, who today are here to serve as your church representatives. Phoebe, your mentor was Deanne Ison. Emily, your mentor was Hellen Ash. Rebekah, your mentor was Kay Bergerson. Mikayla, your mentor was Cassi Betker. Your special confirmation Bible verse was Psalm 31:14-15, "But I trust in you, O Lord; I say, 'You are my God.' My times are in your hand." Your times: today, and the future that is before you—we commit to God's hands for you.

Mila is new to our church, and so Teresa Gruber, one of our Team Leads, is going to serve as your church representative.

And, Shane, since day one here at church, you have developed a relationship with Steve Ruter. So, he is going to be your church representative.

### Prayer of Blessing

So, I have a baton for each graduate. I'm going to give it to the parents and church representatives, who are going to, together, pass on the baton. The Students will grab the baton, and then everyone freeze in that moment, the moment of transfer. Hold that transfer moment for the prayer, okay? So, parents and mentors, pass them to their students. Students, you grab a hold of the baton, and then everyone hold that pose. The rest of us, if you want, you can extend your hands in blessings to them, as we pray over them. Ready? Let's pray ....

### Announcement

Blessings! You may all return to your seats. But graduates, we'll ask you to come and help us again in a minute.

I know, church, that you want to congratulate our graduates. There's a special time for that immediately following worship today. There's cake in the lobby, and then there is an open house lunch for everyone—tacos!—in honor of our graduates in the fellowship hall. Be sure to stay and celebrate together!

### Holy Communion

Prayer of Confession: Self reflection on your race, and on you as a runner.

[*Silent prayer.*]

Words of Assurance

Words of Institution

The Great Thanksgiving

Prayer of the Holy Spirit

Distribution of the Elements - Graduates

Offering

Song: *A Thousand Generations* -Deborah Peters

### Closing Song: *I Am Free* -Sanctify

### Memory Verse:

"One generation will praise your works to the next one, proclaiming your mighty acts." - Psalm 145:4

### Announcements: -David

- No Wed. Events
- Grad reception, with meal and cake
- Grow groups sign up

### Benediction: -David

I am on Renewal Leave from my pastoral duties after I say "Amen" in the benediction.

Benediction -Pastor David

*Passing the "mantle" to Andrew.*