FIRST (SCOTS) SERMONS

"CARRYING THE BATON"

Scripture Lesson: Hebrews 12: 1-2

This sermon was preached by The Rev. Dr. L. Holton Siegling, Jr. on Sunday, October 26, 2025 at First (Scots) Presbyterian Church in Charleston, South Carolina.

Hebrews 12: 1-2

The Example of Jesus

1 *Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us,* 2 *looking to Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith, who for the sake of the joy that was set before him endured the cross, disregarding its shame, and has taken his seat at the right hand of the throne of God.*

Carrying the Baton

Leader: The word of the Lord.
People: Thanks be to God.

You may recall that on Rally Day, we read this same passage, and we celebrated what it means to be "built on witness and bound to Christ." We also considered how we honor God through our living witness. This morning, we turn our attention once again to Hebrews chapter 12, because there remains more to be said about that aspect of our living witness which we know as stewardship.

Like a baton that is passed from one runner to the next, ours is the task of running as faithfully as we can during our leg of the race. Now, I know that when some folks hear the word "stewardship," they might be tempted to start running in the opposite direction. Nevertheless, this passage reminds us that the race of faith is about faithfully carrying forward that which has been entrusted to us, and doing so with perseverance and gratitude and joy.

Our reading from Hebrews 12 can be found on page 978 in your pew Bible: "Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, who for the sake of the joy that was set before him endured the cross, disregarding its shame, and has taken his seat at the right hand of the throne of God." The Word of the Lord.

Let us pray. Gracious and loving God, may the words of my mouth and the meditation of our hearts be a miracle of your grace, that you would speak to each of us at the point of our need. Grant that we might leave this place strengthened in faith, encouraged in hope, and ready to carry the baton—to run with perseverance the race you have set before us. We trust that you will equip and sustain us, for we pray with gratitude and anticipation in the strong name of Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

In the summer of 2024, the Olympic Games were held in Paris, France, and not surprisingly, the classic events still reigned supreme: swimming, gymnastics, and, of course, track and field. The United States has

always excelled in track and field, and in recent years, we've consistently brought home the most medals. There are plenty of reasons for that: a talent pool of more than 340 million people, early athletic development, and strong collegiate programs. But let's be honest—at the most basic level, it all comes down to talent.

In Paris, our men's 4x100 relay team was absolutely stacked. We had one of the fastest men ever to run the event, along with others who were no slouches themselves. Between them, they boasted a world championship and multiple silver medals. On paper, they should have been the best, and most people expected them to win. And yet, for all their speed, strength, and training, during the very first handoff, the U.S. relay team failed to make the exchange within the zone where it was supposed to happen. Just like that, they were disqualified.

There they stood at the awards ceremony, arguably the fastest team in the world, watching other teams receive medals. I share that vignette from the Paris Olympics to say this: it wasn't speed that decided the race. It was the exchange. And that's not only true of runners; it's also true of the people of God.

The writer of Hebrews reminds us that we are surrounded by "so great a cloud of witnesses," men and women who ran before us and passed the baton to the next generation. I dare say that in little Tate's baptism this morning, we see a visible sign of this truth—that the faith we carry is not ours alone. It is a gift passed down through generations, a reminder that God claims us, calls us by name, and sets us on the course of faith long before we are ever aware of running it.

It becomes increasingly clear as we read the Scriptures that the Christian life is not a casual stroll. It is not a Sunday afternoon drive or a walk in the park, unless that park happens to include hills and hurdles. On the contrary, a faithful life involves movement, action, commitment—it is a race. And notice this important detail: it is "the race that has been set before us." We did not choose the course; God did.

Ours is the task of participating as runners who have been entrusted with the baton of faith, and we do this best when we lay aside every weight and sin that clings so closely. It makes sense, then, to affirm on this Commitment Sunday that stewardship does not begin with giving money. It begins with shedding the burdens that hold us back, including the mistaken belief that what we have somehow belongs to us.

I'm reminded of a little girl whose father bought her some French fries. After a few minutes, he reached over to take one, and she gently slapped his hand and said, "No, Daddy! These are my fries." Her father thought to himself, "Wait a minute. I bought those fries. I'm the one who gave them to her, and I'm the one who will feed her again." I'm afraid we often do the same thing with God.

There's a joke about a man who prayed for a parking space. Just as he pulled into the lot, a car backed out and the space opened up right in front of him. Amazed, he said, "Never mind, God, I found one myself." God may not be overly concerned with our parking spaces, but the point is clear: we often act as though our blessings come from our own doing rather than from the gracious provision of God.

Stewardship frees us from that false weight of ownership and teaches us instead to say, "Lord, this was never mine to begin with. It all belongs to You." If you've ever run a race, you know what it feels like to grow tired, and in life, we get weary too. That is why we are given the encouragement of that great cloud of witnesses. We may not hear them as fans in a stadium, but we hear them through their stories—Abraham, Moses, Rahab, and countless others whose testimony reminds us that this race is worth running.

Each generation has served as a link in the chain of witness, passing the baton forward. Those who first worshiped here nearly 300 years ago, those who built these walls, those who taught Sunday School and sang

the first hymns—they passed the baton to us. That is why the rededication of our organ matters. Every note of praise rests on the faithfulness of those who came before.

Now the baton is in our hands. Stewardship is one way we respond—not only to their witness, but to the God to whom every faithful witness points. Through our stewardship, children grow in faith, neighbors experience compassion, and the grace of God becomes visible in ways seen and unseen.

Hebrews tells us that we endure by fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of our faith. He goes before us, and He completes what we cannot. We run, but God strengthens. We give, but God multiplies. We serve, but God sanctifies the service we render.

Like the Israelites standing at the Jordan River, stewardship is often about stepping forward before the waters part. Every pledge, every offering, every act of service is a step taken in trust. We do not run for a prize that fades, but for an eternal crown.

The cloud of witnesses watches—not to judge, but to cheer. And the question is not how fast we run or how much we give, but whether we are faithful. May we take the baton in our hands and run the race set before us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, until the day we lay the baton at His feet and hear, "Well done, good and faithful servant."

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.