

“Finish Strong”

2 Timothy 4:6-8

Preached by Dr. Robert F. Browning, Pastor

First Baptist Church

Frankfort, Kentucky

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Communion Devotion

As we gather around this table this morning, I want us to do a couple of things before we take the bread and the cup. **First of all, let us remember and honor our members who have gone to be with the Lord in the past year.**

Christians began this annual tradition in the 7th century on what came to be known as All Saints' Day. To this day, many churches have a special service on the first day of every November to remember their members who have died, while others wait until the first Sunday in November.

This morning our children processed into the sanctuary as worship began with banners containing the names of our members who passed away since last November. What makes this even more special is that our children made these banners with the help of their leaders. I deeply appreciate Cynthia and her fine staff of volunteers taking the lead on this.

Please stand as I call off the names of our members who have died in the last twelve months. Dorothy Archer, Cleota Bolling, Patsy Gibson, Robert Harrod, Joyce Johnson, J.C. Jones, James Lewis, Gil McCarty, Leigh Ann Perkins, Whitney Praska, Minnie Lynn Sower, and Lucille Terry.

Like the Apostle Paul, they fought a good fight, they finished their race, and they kept the faith. For this reason, they have been welcomed home and have received their crown for a job well done.

The second thing I want to do this morning is to challenge us to continue the work they began and to finish our race as strongly as they did. These members who have gone to be with the Lord in recent months have passed their baton to us. We must now run the race without them by our side.

In light of this, how can we finish strong like Jesus, Paul and these members we honor today? How can we stay in the race when our legs grow weak, and there seems to be no air in our lungs? How can we remain faithful to God when we face so many distractions and challenges?

I believe the first thing we must do is to understand what God has called us to do and to realize how important it is to Him that we remain faithful. What has God called us to do?

He has called each of us to do the very same things Jesus did: be honest, trustworthy, reliable, dependable, compassionate, generous and humble.

He has called us to tear down walls of suspicion and hate between people by building bridges of respect, goodwill, understanding and reconciliation.

He has called us to make room in our lives for those who are lonely, confused, disturbed and struggling by walking alongside them, listening to their stories and responding to their needs.

He has called us to make hope visible by offering encouraging words and a helping hand whenever we can.

He has called us to be an advocate for those who have no seat at the table of decision making, making sure their plight is made known and their needs are addressed.

He has called us to pursue justice and be peacemakers by speaking truth to power and resolving conflicts without violence.

He has called us to pray for our enemies and forgive those who have hurt us.

He has called us to confess our sins and ask those we have hurt to forgive us.

He has called us to quit doing things which hurt others and ourselves, and replace the cycle of abuse with healthy attitudes and actions.

He has called us to be leaven and salt and light in a dark world groping to find its way.

He has called us to balance cynicism and anger with hope and love.

He has called us to turn enemies into friends by treating them with dignity and respect and by refusing to retaliate after they have hurt us.

He has called us to keep our promises and honor our commitments, even when it demands more of us than we thought it would.

He has called us to be faithful stewards of our time, talents and resources by using them wisely and sharing them generously.

He has called us to share with others all the things we need: food, clothing, shelter, compassion, encouragement, kindness, respect, patience, truthfulness, comfort and hope, just to name a few.

In other words, the God who loves this world, every inch of it and every person in it, has called each of us to be the presence of Christ. We can do no less and call ourselves Christians.

This is a tall order, isn't it? **How can we be this kind of person and do all these things, especially when we face so many challenges and obstacles?**

In my opinion, it can only be done if we keep our eyes focused upon the God who called us, and the people who need us.

God knows this is a tall order, and He understands the challenges we face. This is why He has sent the Holy Spirit to live in our hearts to lead, guide and empower us. His grace truly is abundant and sufficient.

At the same time, we must keep our eyes focused upon the people who are depending upon us to answer God's call and remain faithful in the midst of stiff challenges. We must not let them down. Too much is at stake for us to drop out of the race.

Who needs you to stay in the race? Who needs you to be their role model? Who needs you to inspire them? Who needs you to finish strong?

What do you need to do to run a better race? Let me encourage you to talk to the Lord about this as we take the bread and the cup.