

Title: "Consider Him!"  
Text: Hebrews 12:1-4

If you are visiting with us for Easter, and haven't been with us the past few months,  
-we are in the midst of a sermon series entitled,  
"Living Faith in 3D."

And we have been exploring the multiple dimensions of what it actually looks like to live out a life of faith in the midst of this broken world.

- For the past number of weeks we have been in chapter 11 of the Book of Hebrews in the New Testament.
- That chapter is what is sometimes called the "Hall of Faith."
  - You've heard of the "Hall of Fame," where sports heroes and their exploits are highlighted.
  - Well, Hebrews 11 is the "Hall of Faith" where biblical "heroes" of the Old Testament and their exploits are highlighted.
  - We have looked at the lives of each of the women and men who are listed in Hebrews 11,
    - to see what a "Living Faith" looked like in their lives as they lived it out in their broken world.

Today, on this Easter Sunday, we move into chapter 12 of Hebrews, where the writer now invites us to direct our attention to Jesus.

- He is the one, the writer says, who is the real hero of our living faith.

Listen to what he says in Hebrews 12:1-3.

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"Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart."

Have any of you come to worship today feeling weary in your heart of hearts?

- Has your life been wearing you down and wearing you out?
  - Does the world around you seem so discouraging these days that you are losing heart? Losing hope? Losing faith, losing love?

This letter to the Hebrews was written to people who were feeling just like that.

-They were First Century Jewish Christians.

And as Jews who had come to faith in Jesus Christ as their Messiah,

-they had been thrown out of their synagogues and ostracized by the Jewish community and their families.

And as Jews they were already ostracized by the wider Roman culture around them.

Every day they faced public insult and persecution.

-Some of them had been imprisoned for their faith.

-Some of them had had their houses and property confiscated.

-Some had been whipped and beaten and killed.

And in the beginning, they had faced this opposition with amazing faith.

The writer to the Hebrews reminds them in an earlier chapter of how they had “stood their ground in the face of suffering.”

-How they had endured insults with boldness and joy.

-How they had stood side by side with other Christians and not abandoned those who had been thrown into prison.

But now, years of this have gone by, and those Christians are feeling weary in body, mind, and soul.

-They have been worn down by life in this world.

-Their hope is being exhausted.

-They are questioning their faith in God.

Life in this world can do that to you, can't it?

Life in your own family can do that to you sometimes?

-But the world around us right now is doing this to everyone.

-The gun violence, the terrorism, the political divisiveness, the extremism, the fears we live with every day.

-People everywhere are anxious and angry.

-We have grown weary and are losing heart.

This letter to the Hebrews was written for people like that.

-And in these three little verses in Hebrews 12, the writer asks us to “consider Jesus.”

And on Easter Sunday, taking a little time to consider Jesus seems like a pretty appropriate thing to do.

-Isn't that why we came here today?

And in each of these three verses there is a word of encouragement for weary people as they turn their eyes off of the problems all around them, and consider Jesus.

We're going to go backwards through the text today, and begin with verse 3, and then verse 2, and then verse 1.

1. Verse 3 again says, "Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart."

Holy Week and Easter is a time set aside every year for reminding ourselves of what Jesus went through for us.

He endured such opposition from sinful men,  
-that they falsely accused him, arrested him,  
ramrodded through an illegal trial during the night,  
-manipulated the Roman Governor to have him executed  
even though the Governor could find nothing he had  
done to deserve such a fate.

They then had him stripped and whipped and beaten and spat upon.

-They paraded him through the streets of Jerusalem and out to the place of the skull where they crucified him.

The writer to the Hebrews says, "You think you have it bad?"

-Consider him who endured that kind of opposition from a sinful world.

-The world not only wore him out and wearied him:

-the world actually hung him on a cross and crucified him.

And my friends, this is not just a reminder that there is always someone worse off than you.

-It's a reminder of how far God was willing to go to enter into this sinful world of ours to come alongside us.

-It's a reminder that God is no stranger to the pain and suffering and death and dying and violence of this world.

He has entered into it, and taken it upon Himself in Jesus Christ.

He has taken the worst this world has to offer, and suffered it with us and for us.

The writer to the Hebrews is reminding weary people, that God is with us in a suffering world.

-Living Faith is trusting in that every day. Relying on it:

-That He is not far away, but is with us right in the midst of this world.

2. Then secondly in verse 2, the writer tells us how what Christ did in the midst of His suffering is a model for us.

He writes, *“Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, despising its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.”*

This is a model of how to endure and persevere:

-we keep our eyes fixed on Jesus, who for the joy set before him...endured the cross!

“For the joy set before Him.”

-The thing that enabled Jesus to endure and persevere through the opposition and pain and sin of this broken world,

-was the joy set before him.

-He was looking forward to the redemption that His heavenly Father was in the process of accomplishing in this world.

He wasn't rejoicing in the brokenness all around him.

-He was rejoicing in the promise of restoration that was coming.

-He was looking forward to the mending of the brokenness.

And he knew that His life and death and resurrection were all part of that process of mending the brokenness.

-He could suffer death on the cross, because he knew that death was not the end that God had in mind for him.

- He could take upon himself all of the sin of the world, because He knew that in his death on the cross, -he was actually atoning for that sin so that it could be fully forgiven.
- He could enter into death and hell itself, because he knew that in his resurrection he would vanquish them both.

It was for the joy set before him that he endured the cross, despising its shame.

- And in his resurrection he sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.
- And the joy of that reunion with his heavenly Father made all of the pain of separation from the Father worth it.

This is what the writer to the Hebrews wants Christians in every generation to be encouraged by, too.

- He says that Jesus is the “author and perfecter” of our faith.
- That means, he is the One who initiated faith in us in the first place,
- and He is the One who will bring our faith to completion in the end.
- He is the author who is writing the story of your life,
- and He is the One who has the plot all worked out.

And the middle chapters of every story are always full of conflict, and pain, and dysfunction.

- In the middle chapters the characters are stuck or stranded or separated from loved ones.
- They are in the midst of conflict and doubt and mystery and don't know which way to turn.

But the author is somehow working it all out for some kind of redemption in the end.

- Or at least that's the way stories used to be, until in this post-modern world we gave up on redemptive endings.

But I haven't given up on redemptive endings.

- And that's because I actually believe in “THIS STORY.”
- And in the God of this story.
- And I believe that He is the author and perfecter not only of this story, but of MY story.

And so for the joy set before me,  
-the joy of that redemptive ending  
-the joy of discovering in the end that God has been  
    working all things in my life together for my good and for  
    the display of his glory,  
-the joy of knowing that even in the middle chapters of my  
    life He is guiding me, teaching me, maturing me,  
    forgiving me, strengthening me, encouraging me, and  
    never leaving me,  
-for the joy of knowing that in the end, He will also be the  
    One leading me Home to himself,  
    -and welcoming me into His Kingdom by His grace and  
    mercy,  
-that is what enables me to endure and persevere.  
-It's for the joy set before us.

3. And thirdly, in verse 1, the writer to the Hebrews gives us  
    another metaphor to encourage us in living a life of faith  
    in this broken world.

He uses the image of a race. A long distance race.

-Not a sprint, but a marathon.  
-Boston is getting itself ready for our marathon in a couple  
    weeks, and so the image is a good one for us in April.

He writes, *"Therefore, 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."*

First he mentions the crowd of fans that are lining the streets  
    and cheering us on as we run the race of our lives.

-This "great cloud of witnesses" he speaks of are all of the  
    people of faith of previous generations that have already  
    finished their race and are now in heaven cheering us on.

In the context of this letter, they are all of the Old Testament  
    saints who he has spoken of the chapter 11 of the letter.

-Abel and Enoch, Noah, Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and  
    Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Joshua, Rahab, Ruth and so  
    many more.

He tells these first Century Jewish Christians, that all of those Old Testament saints are surrounding them and cheering them on.

And guess what? You and I have 20 Centuries of other Christians who have lived lives of faith in their generations and are also in heaven cheering us on right now.

-That's a serious crowd of cheering fans on our side.

-Can you keep that image in your mind this week as you go back to life after Easter?

-Would it help you this week to have a sense that Peter and Paul, and St Francis of Assissi, and Catherine of Sienna,

-and Doris Barnes, and Warren Milley, and Valerie

Fournier, and older Bill Redford,

-were rooting for you, and cheering you on?

And then the writer speaks of throwing off everything that hinders us and the sin that so easily entangles us.

-That is part of what we get to do together here today.

-This sanctuary is a place to come and get lightened from the burdens of life and sin.

-In a minute we will gather at the Table and take the bread and the cup, and renew our covenant with God,

-and ask again that our sins might be forgiven by the blood of Christ.

We get to disentangle ourselves from the sin that so easily entangles us.

-We get to throw off the gunk of life that has weighed us down.

-We get to have our souls restored by the Bread of Life.

I invite you today, to think of it as throwing off everything that hinders you from running the race of faith.

-Think of it as preparation for going back into the world to run again with perseverance.

And think of it as refocusing us again on the prize.

-Marathon runners also run with their eyes on the finish line.

-It's for the joy of crossing that finish line that they endure the training, the shin splints, the blisters, the hours of preparation, the 26 miles of putting one foot in front of the other.

It's for the joy set before them that they run the race with perseverance.

That's what Jesus did as He came to run with us and for us and alongside us.

That's what faithful followers of Jesus have done in every generation.

-That's what we are invited to do in our generation.

*"Since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses,  
-let us throw off everything that hinders us and the sin that  
so easily entangles us,  
-and run with perseverance the race that is marked out  
for 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 [ROSE AGAIN] 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 or lose heart."*

Let us pray.