


Welcome and Land Acknowledgement

*As we come to worship in Jesus' name we acknowledge with gratitude and respect the Lkwungen people – the Songhees, Esquimalt and WSÁNEĆ – on whose traditional and unceded territory we gather. We commit ourselves to just and respectful relationships within our congregation and our neighborhood.*

Video message from The Rev. Dr. Richard Topping – Principal of Vancouver School of Theology

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*Friends,*

*I am Richard Topping, President and Vice-Chancellor of the Vancouver School of Theology.*

*Thank you for your participation in VST Sunday. This annual event has brought faculty, students and staff to share in the worship of churches across the country. We love this opportunity to support the work of our partner denominations, and to tell you a little bit about the work of Vancouver School of Theology.*

*Like all of you, we have felt a little like we are running in the sand in the recent past. It takes more effort to achieve the same results in a time like this. And yet, our faculty, students and staff have shown such resilience and support of each other. We conduct our classes online now, and that has opened up the classroom to students from across the country and around the world. We have reached record enrollment numbers in our classes. Our guiding principles are the safety and well-being of the VST community and the delivery of an excellent theological education.*

*2021 was our 50th anniversary. We built a new “zoom” room with immersive technology, so that students online are full participants in the classroom where others are physically present. We just received a large 1m dollar grant from the Lilly Endowment to renew our field education programs, ensuring that students get excellent mentorship in preparation for ministry.*

*Plans and estimates are in the works for the renovation and renewal of Epiphany Chapel to green the building and make it an inviting space for worship and student activity for years to come. We want our facilities to serve our mission – to educate and form thoughtful, engaged and generous Christian leaders.*

*Here's what some of our students are saying about their classes at VST over this past year: “This has been one of the most inspirational classes I have ever taken.” “I have studied in New Zealand, in London, and now VST - I have enjoyed it all, but my VST experience is far and away the best of the three.” “I am feeling and understanding this time as a gift from God to renew my faith.”*

*Friends, at VST students go deep with God so that they go wide through the church to the world in service. Please pray for us, and our deepest thanks for your support especially in this last year. Blessings to you.*

➤ **Gathered in the love of Christ**

## Call to Worship

We praise our divine Creator as we set down our burdens in this time of worship.

(palms of hands facing down)

Our gracious God sustains and encourages us in our journey of faith.

(palms of hands facing upwards)

We are precious in God's sight – beloved and embraced in love.

(arms crossed over chest)

Let us worship God – Creator, Saviour, Spirit – let us pray...

## † Gathering Prayer and the Lord's Prayer (PCC Resources)

Almighty and everlasting One, your power is incomparable, your majesty infinite, and your love beyond our imagining. You are hidden in mystery, and yet so present. In a hectic world, you are peace and rest. In a harsh world, you are tenderness and mercy. In the cold and dark of winter, you are light and comfort, and so we bring you our worship, for you are the One who created us, the One who redeems us, and the One who gives us life – the one to whom we offer all love and loyalty in Jesus' name.

Holy one, we confess our faults and failings, knowing you know us through and through. You tell us love is patient and kind, and you know when our patience and kindness fall short. You tell us love is never rude or selfish, and you see the times we insist on our own way. Forgive us the excuses we make to ourselves when our love falters. Strengthen us by your Spirit so that our love is genuine and reliable. We pray together as Jesus taught... ***Our Father, who art in heaven – hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come – thy will be done – on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen***

## Words of Hope

God is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love. As high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is God's love; as far as the east is from the west, so far has God removed our sins. Thanks be to God whose love and forgiveness are steadfast. May we be steadfast in our forgiveness of one another.

➤ ***Lord, speak to me***

**767**

## † Prayer for Understanding (adapted from a prayer by Julia Seymour)

**Divine Source of love and life, we come before you to read the scripture in joy and with humbleness of heart. Prepare us in mind, body, and spirit for the truth that will encounter us today. Open us, through the Holy Spirit, to live our faith in word and deed, becoming more fully the people you have made and called us to be. Amen**

## Scripture

### **Hebrews 12: 1-3** [NT 226]

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.

Consider him who endured such hostility against himself from sinners, so that you may not grow weary or lose heart.

### **1 Corinthians 9: 24-27** [NT 172]

Do you not know that in a race the runners all compete, but only one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may win it. Athletes exercise self-control in all things; they do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable one. So, I do not run aimlessly, nor do I box as though beating the air; but I punish my body and enslave it, so that after proclaiming to others I myself should not be disqualified.

This is the word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

### Message – **TOGETHER IN THIS RACE** – Astrid Melatunan

Like the Word of God today, the heroes of faith in chapter 11 of the book Hebrew are called "witnesses," as many as the clouds around us, and we are described as people in the race. Imagine that we are in a giant stadium, and the heroes of faith (Abraham, Isach, Jacob, Noah, Moses, etc.) sit in seating rails of supporters (because they had ended the race) and we are the focus of attention, who are fighting in the arena of the race.

According to the BibleHub, race was from the Greek word AGONA, which means struggle, "fighting the good fight of faith" (1 Tim 6:12), a gruelling conflict, anxiety, contention (BibleHub). Suffered, been shamefully treated (Phil. 1:30), etcetera. It's not an easy race journey, so what we need to do first before continuing this race is a **screening check**.

*Have we ever seen a runner running with a backpack, or a 1kg rapper's necklace? I think no, they will choose the lightest and most comfortable clothes and shoes so they can run smoothly.*

So, the first instruction the author gives to us is we need to ask ourself "**is there a weight in our life we must lay aside?**" As the Bible says, "Let us lay aside every weight, and the sin."

Sin can hold us back. But there are also things that may not be sin (**every weight**) but are merely hindrances that can keep us from running effectively the race God has for us. So, again, I would like to invite us to reflect, "**is there a weight in our life we must lay aside?**"

It's very clear that there are "weights" in our lives that hold us down and entangle us making the race, making that looking to Jesus that much harder. The thing is a lot of times sins are easily identifiable though they are deceitful, there are the things that we often first see – things that God has commanded us not to do that we are doing or things that God has commanded us to do that we're failing to obey.

But sometimes identifying the weights is a little bit more difficult. A lot of times there are things in our lives that maybe are not sinful in themselves but they serve as distractions – they serve to take precedence of our focus in order that we end up in sin later. Something unnecessary in the race. In our lives, there are all kinds of things that we take on that are causing us to sweat unnecessarily in our walk with Jesus. Sometimes we bring weights onto ourselves. For example, maybe we struggle with self comparison. A good question to ask might be 'is spending a lot of time on social media (which is not necessarily sinful in itself), helping you in your pursuit in Jesus or is it just causing more struggle and more of a battle? Is it causing you to sweat unnecessarily?' Or maybe we struggle to keep our thoughts pure or our speech pure. We might look to habits with television, maybe that TV show is not that simple in itself or anything, but is it helping you to redirect your thoughts toward Christ?

As I heard John Piper one time say, "A lot of times we're asking the wrong question. We're asking: is this activity sin, instead of asking does this help me run?" That is the question.

I want to encourage you to identify what those weights are and seek to put them off because I promise you, according to the book of Hebrews, there is so much more joy in the person of Jesus. He has lived, died, and been raised from the dead and has worked so many things to afford us His grace and endless joy and eternal life. There is nothing better than Him. He is worth putting off all of these things.

Interestingly, in this race we are not forced to run fast, as hard as we can, but the next instruction is RUN WITH PERSEVERANCE. This is what an athlete needs, namely ENDURANCE, PERSEVERANCE, DETERMINATION, DISCIPLINE. "It is unhurrying and yet undelaying, but goes steadily" (Braclay). Just keep running, we are not fighting with time, but endurance. The key is not on the speed, but how we do it.

Next, the Bible clearly gives instructions or the key to winning this race is not on speed, **but on our mindset or focus**, which could be "the weight" that can be a burden that prevents us from running fast. The Bible clearly instructs us: **LOOKING AT JESUS, AS A ROLE MODEL THAT HAS ALSO ENDED THE GAME WITH ENDURANCE.**

**The instructions for running and looking up at Jesus are EVERYTHING in our reading today.** There is no guarantee that everything will be smooth, easy, and without obstacles, but verses 2 and 3 really strengthen us today. The Bible seems to be speaking to us, saying...

First, maybe in the course of our lives we are opposed by those around us. Our thoughts are considered strange, our opinions are not taken into account, and often contradict others. Don't let it become a burden and distract you! God's Word today encourages us, **“Keep running with perseverance! Looking to Jesus! Jesus endured the contradiction of sinners against himself, yet Jesus endured their evil manners with great patience.**

Second, if we are on the way to follow Christ, and serve Him, and have to deny ourself, take up his cross. Or maybe sometimes we feel betrayed, disrespected, our good deeds are repaid with evil / betrayal. Don't let it become a burden and distract you! The Bible says, **“Keep running with perseverance! Look at Jesus! The greatest teacher ever, miracle worker, promise keeper, the best friend, a generous guy, but see what happened to him? Jesus was betrayed by loved ones, even Jesus carried the cross, was nailed, and endured a painful, ignominious, and accursed death, in which Jesus was numbered with the transgressors, the vilest malefactors; yet all this Jesus endured with invincible patience and resolution.”**

Or third, maybe we feel humiliated, insulted, either personally or in group problems. Don't let it become a burden and distract you! The Word of God today encourages us to **“Keep running with perseverance! Look 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, ...”** Jesus despised the shame. All the reproaches that were cast upon him, both in his life and at his death, Jesus despised; Jesus is infinitely above them; Jesus knows his own innocence and excellency, and despised the ignorance and malice of his despisers.

Hey runners/believers! We have a great coach/rule model! ***Jesus is the prime example of the faithful endurance.*** The author uses the words pioneer and perfecter, ***Archegos*** and ***Teleiotes***. In Greek, ***Arch*** means First and ***Tel*** means Last. This means that he not only starts everything as an example, our role model, or the object and the author of our faith, ***but he participates in this race with us, perfecting our faith, with us to the finish line, so that we may not grow weary or lose heart but end the race well. Jesus is the finisher of our faith – Jesus is the judge and the rewarder of our faith.***

I like to imagine, so while preparing for this, I imagined while trotting along, Jesus is encouraging. Jesus is not only sitting in the supporting bench, but Jesus is like a coach who even runs with us, provides strategy, motivation, treats us when we have sprains, gives us water and vitamins, wipes our sweat and tears, even with patience and understanding gives us permission to rest when we are very tired. And Jesus might shout: “You can do it champ!” “I did that before. Truly, truly, I say to you – you who believe in me will also do the works that I do; and greater works than these will you do, because I go to the Father.” (John 14:12)

I interpreted it with my own words: “Bro! If I can do this, I promise you, YOU’VE GOT THIS!”

The writer of Hebrews or even Jesus does not promise a smooth running or a victory without a struggle, but Jesus promises that God is with us in the race! I was reminded of an Indonesian song written by Andrew Chen which says:

*Tuhan tak pernah janji langit selalu biru  
Tetapi Dia berjanji selalu menyertai  
Tuhan tak pernah janji jalan selalu rata  
Tetapi Dia berjanji berikan kekuatan*

***God never promises the sky will always be blue  
But God promised to always be there  
God never promises that our path will always  
be smooth  
But God promised to give strength***

By reflecting on the examples of the heroes of faith who are now witnesses like the clouds that surround us, running with perseverance, and still looking at Jesus, who actively runs with us, together we finish the race.

To conclude, there is a video clip that you likely have seen before. True story, Dick Hoyt – who just died early this year – competed with his son, who has cerebral palsy. During competition, Dick pulled Rick in a special boat as they would swim, carried him in a special seat in the front of a bicycle, and pushed him in a special wheelchair as they ran. Hopefully this story at least becomes a picture for us that our God is in the race with us. **VIDEO**

That life is a race is true, but the fact that God participates in the race and the hope that God will accompany us to the finish line is an extra strength for us, the athletes of life.

Again! **"Is there a weight in our life we must lay aside? JESUS, WHO HAS ENDED THE RACE PERFECTLY ON THE CROSS IS WITH US. Keep running with perseverance! Looking to JESUS!**

➤ ***May the mind of Christ my Saviour*** **644**

† Offering Invitation

As we give our gifts to God today, let us remember times when God has given us strength in the face of our challenges, and know that our generosity will help others face theirs, as we reach out in Jesus' name.

➤ ***Praise God from whom all blessings flow*** **306**

† Offering Prayer

**Good and gracious God, we bring our offering in gratitude for all that makes our lives good, even in uncertain times. Bless these gifts with your Spirit and use them through the ministry and mission of our church to touch lives in need of your goodness, in Jesus' name. Amen**

† Pastoral Prayer – video from Ray Aldred, VST, Director of Indigenous Studies

 [PrayerbyRay.mov](#)

*Creator, today I look to the East and I thank you for the wisdom and good things that come from the east. I pray you would give us strength to learn.*

*I thank you for the healing and abundance that comes from the South. I pray for healing to come to all our relatives. Make us people who your healing and love flow through.*

*I face the West and I remember those who have gone to be with you. I ask that you would help us remember and live better lives because of their memory.*

*We even thank-you for the hard things that come with the North Wind. Give us grace to understand how we live in the midst of these challenges we are facing.*

*I look down and thank-you for mother earth who shelters, feeds, and teaches us.*

*We look up to you. You are big and we are small, help us.*

*Now that we are in the sacred centre, where all things are related, help us to grow and be who you created us to be. All my relatives, uh oh*

➤ ***Christ, you call us all to service*** **585**

**Blessing** (based on Hebrews 12:1-3)

Sisters and brothers,  
since we stand surrounded by all those who have gone before,  
an enormous cloud of witnesses,  
let us drop every extra weight,  
every sin that clings to us and slackens our pace,  
and let us run with endurance the long race set before us.

Stay focused on Jesus,  
who designed and perfected our faith.  
He endured the cross  
and ignored the shame of that death  
because He focused on the joy that was set before Him;  
and now He is seated beside God on the throne,  
a place of honour.

In the same way,  
let us also focus on the race ahead.  
Go into the days of this week  
strong in the presence of the Holy Spirit,  
and confident that God goes with you.

➤ ***Go now in peace (round)*** **622**