TITLE: Standing Firm-Stay the course

TEXT: 1 Co. 15:58; Phil 3:7-15; Ps. 20:7; 2 Co. 1:21-22; 1 Co. 16:13-14

INTRODUCTION: This morning I want to talk about standing firm, particularly, standing firm in the faith.

Once we accept Christ, once we become a Christian, we are admonished by God to stand firm in that faith..

**1 Cor. 15:58 (NIV)
58Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain.**

**58Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you.**

Stand firm***= hed-rah'-yos***

 **(to *sit*); *sedentary*, that is, (by implication) *immovable:*—settled, steadfast.**

We have been called to stand firm.. Be immovable, be steadfast in our faith.

We are even told how we can do that.

 **By always giving ourselves fully to the work of the Lord letting nothing move us or distract us from that calling.**

There is a story….the setting is a cold January morning in a little town in Northern Wisconsin on the southern shore of Lake Superior.

 It happened to be a Saturday when the town held the annual dog sled race on the lake. A one mile course had to be staked out by sticking little fir trees in the ice.

 Because of the steep slope of the shore, those standing above the ice could easily view the entire course.

 It was a youngsters meet, and the contenders ranged all the way from large boys with several dogs and large sleds to one little guy, who was about 6 years old, with a tiny sled and one small dog.

 They all took off at the signal, and soon the little boy with the single dog was quickly outdistanced. He was so far behind that it seemed as though he wasn’t even in the race or was running one by himself.

 All went well with the other racers until….about half way around…..the team that was in second place started to pass the team then in the lead. In the excitement of the race, the driver of the second place team guided his dogs too close to the lead team, and the dogs got into a fight.

 Then as each team came up, their dogs would join in the fighting. None of the young drivers could seem to steer their dogs and sleds around the ever-growing mass of fighting dogs. The race had turned into a seething mass of fighting, snaping, charging, growling, tumbling and barking dogs---all tangled up in sleds, boys and harnesses!

 The drivers of those sleds were in the middle, striking out at the dogs, hitting, and trying to pull them apart. Whistling and shouting, the boys pulled with all of their strength to free their full grown, angry and growling Alaskan Huskies. It was a total mess!

 From the position of the spectators, what was once a race appeared to be just one huge seething mass of kids, sleds and dogs..

 Then they could see that little 6 year old boy with the little sled and the single small dog closing in on the fight. He simply guided his dog around the jumbled pile of boys, sleds and fighting dogs---he was the only one to manage it. He crossed the finish line amid the cheering of the crowd, taking first place and making him, not just the winner but the only one to finish the race.

 When he was interviewed at the finish line, he was asked how he did it. His reply was simple: “I just kept on going and kept my dog from getting into the fight. That’s all!”

 I just kept on going and kept my dog from getting into the fight.

 That is exactly how we stand firm in the faith.

 We just keep on going.. Keep on going and steer our life clear of worldly turmoil’s and temptations.

The Apostle Paul said it this way….

**Philippians 3:7 -15 (NIV)**

**7But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ.****8What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ****9and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith.****10I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death,****11and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead.**

**12Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me.****13Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead,****14I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.**

**15All of us who are mature should take such a view of things..**

**13Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, 14I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.**

What Paul is talking about is standing firm in the faith here.

 Standing firm in the faith will often require that we forget what is behind and strain toward what is ahead.

What are some of the things behind us that we must forget in order for us to strain toward what is ahead?

One thing that we must leave behind us in order for us to press ahead is the life that we once lived outside of Christ.

To stop thinking back to the way things used to be before we came to Christ. Mentally living or reliving the past can interfere with our future as a Christian.

 Example: I have a friend that got caught up in the drug lifestyle at a very young age.. He was out on his own at the age of 14. He got caught up in what would be a 20-25 year drug habit . As a teenager he lived on the street. Where it was survival of the fittest. Fitness being defined by how tough you were or how powerful you had become in the drug world. His entire lifestyle had become one of drugs and survival in that particular world. He eventually got married and had children without any change in that lifestyle. When I first met him the only real job that he had ever had was selling drugs to support his family and his habit.

 Then one day He accepted Christ. God delivered him from a 20 year meth habit! The one thing that hindered this new walk with Christ for this man was that he had a very hard time letting go of his past.

You would sit down and talk with him and inevitably he would start talking about the old days and his old life.

Usually not in a positive way, I mean he regretted his past and all the pain, that he had not just endured himself, but the pain that he had caused others….

 But he seemed to spend an unhealthy amount of time reflecting upon those times and I could see that it was hindering his walk with Christ.

One day I told him that he needed to forget what was behind and press on toward what lies ahead..

 That can be very hard to do because what is behind, even though what lies behind us may not be all the pleasant, it is still familiar, it is something known…. What lies ahead may be very unfamiliar, may be very unknown…

But the difference for all us who have accepted Christ is that Christ is in our future and so our future is something that we can confidently press on toward.

Familiarity can become security for us just because it is the known rather than the unknown…..

What we need to do as Christians is to strain toward what lies ahead of us so that we become familiar with what God has for us in the future.

 Or to borrow some words from a man named-- Walter Henricksen,

*We need to make a conscious decision to forget past failures so we can embrace future successes!*

 We need to **forget** **what is behind and strain toward what is ahead…**

Another thing that we need to leave behind us in order to enable us to strain toward what is ahead of us is our securities..

Leave behind what we once trusted in before we came to Christ.

 When Cortez landed at Vera Cruz in 1519 to begin his conquest of Mexico with a small force of 700 men, he purposely set fire to his fleet of 11 ships. His men on the shore watched their only means of retreat sinking to the bottom of the Gulf of Mexico. With no means of retreat, there was only one direction to move, forward into the Mexican interior to meet whatever might come their way.

 Cortez intentionally destroyed the security of the past in order to move into the potential victory of the future.

 What a motivation those burning ships must have been for his army to go forth and get the job done.

 In paying the price for being Christ's disciple, we too must purposefully destroy all avenues of retreat. Resolve that whatever the price for being His follower, we will have to press on.

 When the Israelites entered the Promised Land to take possession of Canaan, they entered it by blind faith. One command that God had given them was that they were not to have Chariots and they were not to have horses.

 This would be like God telling us as a nation today to go in and make war against another army but don’t take any planes or tanks or ships when the other army has all of those things.

 Why did God do that?

 So that they would put all their trust in what lay ahead and not in what lay behind them. And what lay ahead was the promise of Gods sufficiency.

 God told them that the battle was not theirs, but the battle was the Lords.

 So the Israelites went forth in the power and promise of the Lord…..

 They had nothing within themselves that would ensure the victory except their faith in the one who called them to go.

 It is because of this that King David later wrote:

**Psalms 20:7 (NIV)**

**7Some trust in chariots and some in horses,**

**but we trust in the name of the LORD our God.**

 We need to be willing to leave the securities of this world behind us in order for us to courageously advance into the promise of what lies ahead of us as a child of God.

**Some trust in chariots and some in horses,**

**but we trust in the name of the LORD our God!**

 Today,some trust in large bank accounts or their stock portfolios or their retirement plans or their houses or cars or jobs as their security, but we will place our trust in the name of the Lord.

 We trust in a God who has promised to never leave us or forsake us. We trust in a God who has promised to stick closer to us than any brother.

 We trust in a God who not just owns the cattle on a thousand hills but who owns the hills themselves.

David Livingstone once said*: I will place no value on anything I have or may possess, except in relation to the kingdom of Christ.*

**13Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, 14I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.**

 We are not just to forget what is behind, forget our past failures and mistakes, forget our worldly securities, but we are to strain toward what lies ahead! To press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called us heavenward in Christ Jesus.

 There are two important verbs used here; we are to strain & we are to press on…

***Strain= ep-ek-ti'-nom-ahee***

**to *stretch* (oneself) forward *upon:*—reach forth.**

 **Press on=*dee-o'-ko***

**to *pursue*—ensue, follow (after), given to, press toward even if to suffer persecution**

How many of you have learned that having faith in Christ will stretch you at times?

 That pressing on in the faith can cause a certain amount of suffering….

Faith is like a muscle….It must be stressed; it must be strained before it will grow stronger. And in that process, there is a certain amount of suffering involved.

Example: If you have allowed yourself to get out of shape just sit down tonight and do 25 or 30 sit-ups and pushups and see how your stomach and arm mussels feel tomorrow

Your muscles are getting stronger but there is a certain amount of pain involved as you stretch and flex those muscles.

 The same is true with our faith. Like a mussel it needs to be stressed and pressed before it will grow, and in that process of stretching and pressing there will be pain at times, but the end result, if we keep it up, is we will grow as a Christian and our faith will become stronger through the process.

 When he was in his mid-80's, the great cellist Pablo Casals kept practicing his instrument for four or five hours each day. Someone once asked him why, at his age, he still worked so hard. He said, *"Because," "I have a notion that I am making some progress.*

 It doesn’t make any difference how old or how young of a Christian we are, we need to keep pressing on. We need to keep straining toward what lies ahead of us realizing that with the effort that we are making some progress in and for the Kingdom of God.

 In June l955, Winston Churchill, who was then near the end of his life, was asked to give a commencement address at a British University. At this time he was physically infirm; he had to be helped to the podium. Then he held on to the podium for what seemed an incessant amount of time. He stood with his head down but then finally raised his head, and the voice that years before had called Britain back from the brink of destruction sounded publicly for the last time in history.

 *"Never give up. Never give up. Never give up."* With that, Churchill turned and went back to his seat. It is said that there was silence, and then, as if one person, the whole audience rose to applaud him, because he was a man whose life and words were together. Again and again throughout Churchill's political career, he had known setbacks.

 Three times, his career apparently was over and he was sent off to oblivion, and yet somehow he had a sense that there was still something left after the worst. He led a nation through what was probably the bleakest days in their history as Hitler’s Germany tried to bomb them into submission ….

 Churchill’s philosophy of life and action….Never give up! Never give up! Never give up!

**Forget what is behind and strain toward what is ahead!**

 Dr. Raymond Buker had been an Olympic athlete, and he had run in the 1924 Olympic Games where Eric Liddell had made his mark on athletic history.

 In writing to a friend named Gordon who was going through some very hard times and who was on the verge of just giving up Dr. Buker said:

 *"Dear Gordon: Back in 1923 I once ran an invitational one mile race with Joey Ray and Ray Watson."*

 *We three were members of the relay team that set the world record for the four mile relay held for over twenty years. These two had a better time than I by three or four seconds.*

 *Anyhow, in this race we three were running along at a mile rate together -- the first lap, then the second lap. I suddenly hit a branch of a tree, a solid branch, (with) my left shoulder. It was a terrible blow and stopped me cold. The blow almost knocked me out. For two or three seconds I could not think. I cannot remember whether it knocked me to the ground, but it knocked me out of my running pace, stopped me cold. I remember trying to figure out what I should do next. How could I ever catch them -- should I even bother to stay in the race. Everyone would understand that the blow by the tree branch knocked me out of the race. Somehow, I staggered back on the track and stumbled along. I can see them (now) many, many yards ahead of me.*

 *But I remember one clear conclusion. "I must keep going -- even if I come in long behind. I must not quit." So I kept going. Somehow I won the race.*

 *This then is the lesson I learned: whatever the difficulty – whatever the blow -- we must keep on. God will lead to the result that will glorify Him."*

 Gordon said, it was powerful advice, I seized it. If you are on the ground today, I hope you will too.

 Most of the time whether we stay in the race or not, whether we press on toward the prize, strain towards what lies ahead of us or not will depend upon one simple thing.. Attitude.

 Charles Swindol once said*: The longer I live, the more I realize the impact of attitude on life. Attitude, to me, is more important than facts. It is more important than the past, than education, than money, than circumstances, than failures, than successes, than what other people think or say or do.*

 *It is more important than appearance, giftedness, or skill. It will make or break a company, a church, a home.*

 *The remarkable thing is we have a choice every day regarding the attitude we will embrace for that day. We cannot change our past -- we cannot change the fact that people will act in a certain way. We cannot change the inevitable.*

 *The only thing we can do is play on the one string we have, and that is our attitude -- I am convinced that life is ten percent what happens to me and ninety percent how I react to it. And so it is with you -- we are in charge of our Attitudes.*

What is your attitude as a Christian this morning?

 Is it one of perseverance? One of pressing forward, straining on to win the prize for which God has called you Heavenward in Christ Jesus?

 One of my favorite movies is “The Patriot” with Mel Gibson….

 Gibson plays a reluctant hero of the American Revolution named Benjamin Martin.

 When the American colonies are voting on going to war with Great Britain, Benjamin Martin doesn’t want to get involved. He had fought in the French Indian wars and had his fill of fighting and killing…

 However, After a merciless British officer kills Benjamin Martin’s unarmed 12 year old son in front of him. Benjamin Martin gets involved in a big way!

 After the revolution has gone on a couple years and Benjamin Martin has had another soldier son die in his arms he looses all will to fight….

 Benjamin has a friend who is an officer in the regulars who comes to him at his time of mourning for his son trying to get him to press on as they now have the British on the run…

 And he says to him something that Benjamin’s deceased wife had often said to him while she was alive…Benjamin, stay the course! Stay the course!

Church, the battles may not be over, but the war has already been won! Jesus secured the ultimate victory for us on Calvary’s cross!

 All that we need to do is to stay the course! The victory is already ours!

 **Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, 14I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.**

Church, forget what lies behind, the troubles, the failures, the temporal securities of yesterday, and strain toward what lies ahead....What lies ahead is an eternity with Christ in His glorious kingdom..

 Press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called you Heavenward in Christ Jesus.

 The prize of Heaven! The prize of the crown of life! The prize of a resurrection body that will never experience the frailties of this one---pain or sorrow, suffering or death.

 We serve a risen savior who has gone on before us and who has already secured us the victory.

We simply need to stay the course…

**2 Cor. 1:21 -22 (NIV)
21Now it is God who makes both us and you stand firm in Christ. He anointed us, 22set his seal of ownership on us, and put his Spirit in our hearts as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come.**

 **1 Cor. 16:13 -14 (NIV)
13Be on your guard; stand firm in the faith; be men of courage; be strong. 14Do everything in love.**

 This morning, are you standing firm in your faith? Are you determined to stay the course? Determined to strain toward what lies ahead, press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called you heavenward in Christ Jesus?