

## MORRISON ZION EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

[www.mzluth.org](http://www.mzluth.org)

April 6, 2025  
5<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Lent

Pastor James Enderle

First Lesson: [Isaiah 43:16-21](#)

Psalm of the Day: Psalm 73b

Second Lesson/Sermon Text: [Philippians 3:4b-14](#)

Gospel Lesson: [Luke 20:9-19](#)

### OPEN DOOR POLICIES Hiding Treasure in the Trash RUN THE RIGHT RACE IN CHRIST

1. Your \_\_\_\_\_ is in Jesus, not your own \_\_\_\_\_.
2. Don't follow the crowd; find the true \_\_\_\_\_ of Jesus and \_\_\_\_\_.
3. The resurrection is not just the \_\_\_\_\_ but also, the \_\_\_\_\_.

Welcome to worship today at Morrison Zion Lutheran Church. We exist to glorify God. We have set out to do this by gathering around the Gospel so that we may grow in the Gospel and go to others with this Gospel.

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from Jesus Christ, our Lord:

To start out today, I'm going to share a little bit about a bike race that happened just a little over a month ago, on February 19. The name of this race is called the Volta ao Algarve. Here is a map of the race.



This was about a 190 kilometer race, which would be about 120 miles. This is the first stage of about five stages of a big race in Portugal. What you are going to see here is the end of that first stage. It's a short (about one-minute) clip. They've been riding for about 120 miles and now they are nearing the finish line. [See the clip here:](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Rp66VcQnZaE&ab_channel=JeJapTV)  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Rp66VcQnZaE&ab\\_channel=JeJapTV.](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Rp66VcQnZaE&ab_channel=JeJapTV)



Instead of going step by step, I'm going to show a few pictures here. This is the very end of it. You can see that there are two little round-a-bouts. The round-a-bout before the end, they go on the right. So they are getting to the end and they go on the right again, but in small detail, they were supposed to go on the left side of that round-a-bout. You can see how they could easily make a mistake.

In this next picture, do you see the one guy in the yellow? All the other bikers are starting to go to the right and he is pointing, saying "No! This way! This way!"



Then we see the end of the race. Up in the top right corner, you see the guy who is cheering because he's finishing the race in the right spot. Then there are all these other people racing by on the wrong track.

This last picture shows all these people are ahead but they didn't finish the race. They didn't complete the race. They had gone 120 miles and they worked so hard, but then they went off track.



What does this have to do with our text? We can see often in life run races, but when it comes to having the zeal and the passion, it really matters that we are running the right race and that we're going in the right direction. A little turn here, even if I'm striving really hard, can make all the difference if you're running the wrong race.

How does Paul encourage us to run the right race? What Paul begins talking about in Philippians 3, **running the right race in Christ**, is about himself. We had some different lessons from Paul and he doesn't really like to do this, but he says: ***If someone else thinks they have reasons to put confidence in the flesh, I have more...*** He lists off all these different things. He was circumcised on the eighth day, the right day. He was from the people of Israel, the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee; as for zeal, persecuting the church... He had all of the things he was supposed to be doing for the Jewish people. He was lifted up and exalted and as he was running the race, he was running as hard as he could. But he also was finding his identity in all of that, in his zeal, in how hard he was straining. Not only just how hard he was straining but in who he was.

What can we learn from that? We see what he is then going to say is important for him. He says: ***But whatever were gains to me I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them garbage, that I may gain Christ and 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 on the basis of faith.*** He has been struggling and striving and finding his identity in his race, in who he was, in his family, in his job, in his passion, and he was pretty good at it, but now what is he finding it in? To be found in Christ. What is the race we want to be running? It's to understand ***your identity is in Jesus, not your own zeal.***

There are so many things that people want us to be zealous about. It's almost all about that. If you are just passionate about something, that's good. If you just have faith in something, that's good. Look at the world and you can see there are so many people that are passionate and zealous over things, but are they running the right race? Are they finding their identity in that cause, in that movement, and how hard they fight for that movement? What does it actually get them? Our world is constantly telling you that *you need to stand up for this. You need to do that. And if you don't do that, you're a bad person. Even if you want to vote for this thing or say this thing, you have to also stand up for that and that and that. You have to be zealous for all of these things.*

Is that what you are finding your identity in—what the world says is important? It's so easy for us to do that. We can get so caught up in, *you have to say this. You have to like this. You have to be against that.* But we want to understand that zealousness. We

can run so hard, we can race so hard, but it's a race that really ends in the wrong place. What we need to be found in is what Paul writes about here of being found in Christ. What amazing words those are. Instead of finding yourself in all these other strivings and achievements, find your identity in Christ. **...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 on the basis of faith.** This is such a beautiful passage that focuses on the fact that we cannot do it. You can strive as hard as you want but it's all found in Christ. As much as we, as Christians, might begin to strive and say it's all about what we do, we have to understand it's all in Christ, and it's a gift.

He talks about how we want to be found in Christ and that this is something that is then given, the righteousness that comes from God on the basis of faith. So many people talk about faith and having that strong zeal, but what you believe in is what really matters. That's what is going to give you the strength and power. You can have a super-strong faith in all sorts of things, but if that thing doesn't give you peace and hope and forgiveness, all that striving and that faith—it's not the faith that saves you but the object. You have to have faith, but if it's in the wrong thing, we're lost.

Then what do we see? We understand that it's not about the zealousness. But what can we still struggle with? We see what he says after he talks about the basis of his faith. He says: ***I want to know Christ—yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, attaining to the resurrection from the dead.*** When we follow the crowd, they make it that Christ is not worth anything, so then if you give up your Sunday mornings to come and be here, are you mocked or someone says to you, "Why do you want to do that"? Or if you give up living together before you're married because you know that's what God says is good for your marriage in the future; if you give up cheating at work or doing the hard thing by being honest because you know this is what is glorifying to God, is there going to be some pain and suffering? The crowd would say, "Do what is easy. This Jesus guy, this Christianity, there is no value in that." What we then find in what he says is to find that true power of the resurrection, to find true value in Jesus but then also in suffering. **Don't follow the crowd; find the true value of Jesus and suffering,** to know that Jesus gives us that hope and that forgiveness, to help us find our identity in Him, but then to understand that God will bring suffering at times but that doesn't mean He doesn't love us. He also suffered. This is so important. We see that we can become like Him. We participate in His suffering. To understand that when Christ suffered, was that a bad thing? That was essential for our salvation, for Him to go to the cross for us. So we cling to that and understand that through suffering, God can bring us closer to Christ. If I am living the good life, what do I begin to value more and more? I value all the things that God has given me, all the blessings.

Just last week we talked about the two lost sons and how they both got separated from their father because they weren't interested in the father but instead the things the father had to give them. Do we do the same when everything is going well? Are we just

thankful for the stuff instead of God, instead of Jesus and His love for us? We need to see how we, as Christians, can struggle with this zeal and the striving and start to lose the value of Christ when we focus on ourselves and we focus on the hardships and question God.

We need to remember that sin is not always about doing the wrong thing. We think sin is doing the bad thing, but here as Paul talks about what we consider a treasure or trash when he talks about garbage (the word there is very strong, not just trash or garbage but the things that your dog leaves in the yard), the things that we are so blessed with we now consider garbage because we cherish our Savior and the work of Jesus.

When we look at our priorities, we have to wonder what good things I am putting up above God. What good things am I treasuring, all the blessings, all the things that in themselves are not bad, but if I'm making them my treasure instead of Jesus and His love for me, then I can begin to find my identity in those things or in the gifts He has given me, in the relationships He has given me. I have to go back to finding my identity in Jesus. Otherwise, those things are temporary and can be lost and they make it all about us.

As we look at those and we struggle with all those different parts of our lives, we look at what is ahead. What is the finish line of this race in Christ? Paul writes: ***Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already arrived at my goal, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. Brothers and sisters, 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, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.*** Notice here we have a clear finish line, that prize, that heaven is our eternal reward. But we know it's not just the finish line. **The resurrection is not just the finish line but also, the fuel.** It's the thing that helps us to get through the suffering, to get through the persecution, to get through and understand my sins don't own me. Christ's resurrection has such power.

This is what he says in the verses earlier. ***I want to know Christ—yes, to know the power of his resurrection...*** Yes, He died, but He rose again and He wipes those sins away. So when we are suffering, when we are going through difficulty, we can cling to the power of Christ's resurrection. We can look forward to the finish line and know that we, too, will rise. One of the struggles we can have, though, is striving and struggling and finding our identity, even as Christians, in the way that Paul did.

Consider today, as we have Good Confession, and Confirmation next week, and think about that list that Paul started out with and think about how sometimes, as you are striving, as you are going to that finish line or struggling with things, can you think of the things that you would list and boast in? "I was confirmed at Morrison. I went to Morrison Zion Lutheran School. I read my Bible. I serve in this way at church. I helped

these people. I don't do that. I've never cheated on my wife. I've never done this." We can begin to list out all the things that make us righteous instead of clinging to the power of the resurrection.

What does this look like in the life of a Christian? I haven't experienced this as much, but I've heard this often. Sometimes if you're visiting an elderly person, maybe in hospice, they start to consider that the finish line is near, like the race that we saw. What can they start to hold on to? "I went to church every week." "I sang in the choir." "I served in this way." "I served in that way." "I did this." "I'm a good person." Can we do the same thing, where we are so close to the finish line, but then the devil tempts you to trust in yourself instead of taking hold of Jesus, who has taken hold of you? We get zealous again about ourselves. Why do we do this? It's because we follow our sinful nature. We follow the crowd. That huge crowd of bikers who were going the wrong way, it's so easy for us to get into that comparison.

But this is the plea that Paul has with us—to consider all of that rubbish, to consider that all garbage in relationship to who Christ is, to find the power in the resurrection; the power to get through the hard times, to know that you are redeemed, you're forgiven and to get through the times that we cling to our own identity but to find yourself in Christ over and over again. That identity is so important because it tells you that you're forgiven and redeemed and that no one can grasp you from God's hands. It's an identity that says we're striving and working towards the end, but it says that Christ has already taken hold of you. Knowing that (in Verse 14), ***I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward...*** it's done! Know that the race is won in Christ and we get to bask in the work of Jesus.

In all the striving and all the zealousness our world has today, be passionate about this—to find your identity in this movement, in this cause. What's the greatest thing you can be found to be passionate about? It's the grace and mercy and love that Jesus has for you. So run that race, be zealous, but be zealous in the grace and mercy that Jesus has for you—the power of the resurrection, that finish line, and also that fuel. Amen.

***And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.*** [\(Philippians 4:7\)](#) Amen.