

LENT DEVOTIONAL

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LENT DEVOTIONAL APRIL 6, 2025

SCRIPTURE

1 CORINTHIANS 9:19-27

19 For though I am free with respect to all, I have made myself a slave to all, so that I might win more of them. 20 To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews. To those under the law I became as one under the law (though I myself am not under the law) so that I might win those under the law. 21 To those outside the law I became as one outside the law (though I am not free from God's law but am under Christ's law) so that I might win those outside the law. 22 To the weak I became weak, so that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all people, that I might by all means save some. 23 I do it all for the sake of the gospel, so that I may share in its blessings.

24 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. 25 Athletes exercise self-control in all things; they do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable one. 26 So I do not run aimlessly, nor do I box as though beating the air; 27 but I punish my body and enslave it, so that after proclaiming to others I myself should not be disqualified.

DEVOTION

The Rev. Christopher Brown '08

It's 12:55 p.m. when I read the e-mail. A younger couple in our congregation tells me they are considering leaving the church. They don't feel like they can worship with integrity any longer if they're standing beside church members with whom they disagree politically. Actually, it's worse than that. The way some other members of the congregation voted has made them feel unsafe. So, this couple says they will take a break from our church and discern if God is calling them elsewhere.

I close my laptop and decide to go for a long afternoon run to work out my frustration. The Apostle Paul's words come to mind: "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" (1 Cor 9:24). What does it mean to "run to win" when pastoring a purple congregation in a small town? Our church has been one of the increasingly rare places where people on both sides of the aisle still share life together. Does running to win mean avoiding conflict and keeping the peace, "making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit" (Eph 4:3)? Or does it mean being prophetic, preaching more sermons that call for "justice to roll down like mighty waters and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream" (Amos 5:24)? I lament the fact that in churches like ours, these feel like mutually exclusive options.

As I run alongside the lake at the north end of our town, it occurs to me that the first race I need to win is inside myself. That would be the race to master my anger and tame my tongue, to not yell and curse at the worshipers who are driving this couple away. Internally, I also race against fear and people-pleasing, against ego and pride.

Someday I will reach a finish line for all these races, but there's no end in sight today. I pray for strength to endure and wisdom to know which way to turn. Then I keep on running.

PRAYER

Holy God, you call us to run with perseverance the race that is set before us (Heb 12:1). Give us courage to continue and guide us along the way, enabling us by your Spirit to become faithful disciples of Jesus, in whose name we pray. Amen.

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