Last night, we all set our clocks ahead and lost an hour of sleep. While on one hand some thought of it as a “loss” of a precious hour of sleep, but on the other hand some consider as a “gain” of an extra hour of daylight, so you can enjoy the sunshine longer. It depends on how you look at it. Kind of like a half-full, half-empty scenario.

Time is a transient asset. Once it’s gone or lost, no matter how hard you try, we can never gain it back. Personally I don’t think it’s that big of a deal of losing an hour of sleep, once people overcome the initial inconvenience. But by the end of the day, people may come to appreciate the benefit of gaining the extra hour of sunlight especially when the warmer weather is around the corner.

As we are coming near the end of the Lenten season, we are reminded that some people have “given up” certain privileges that they cherish in life in hope to develop a better discipline and closer relationship with God. The season of Lent reminds us of our personal discipline and put us back on the proper perspective in life – God’s perspective, not ours.

In the Scripture that we read earlier, Paul addressed a common question among many of the early Christians, *“how does one obtain righteousness and get into a right relationship with God?”*  Throughout Paul’s writings, we see the common theme of the “economy of one’s faith” often comes up. *What’s there for us to “gain”, if we’re being asked to “give up” our personal privileges and sacrifice, in order to follow Christ?* *What is at stake when we put our faith on the line? Why can’t I just be an incognito Christian? Other people don’t need to know. After all it’s my faith, my life and my God. It’s a personal thing! I do my prayers, read my bible and isn’t that’s good enough. I don’t need others to deepen my faith or need to interact with others.* Well, yes and no.

God is a personal God but also a corporate God. God calls us individually and collectively into a community of faith, in order to seek the common good and welfare of the community over ourselves. None of us can run this race alone without the cooperation, encouragement and support of the others. As we read in our text today, Paul used the metaphor of **running a race** in order to describe one’s faith journey, and how we must strive through our diligence towards the finish line…. *forgetting what lies ahead and straining forward to what lies ahead.* **We must press on** toward the goal of winning the heavenly prize that God has installed of us.

Paul’s letter to the Philippians was a letter of faith and encouragement to the early church and to all of us today. He wrote this while he was being imprisoned in Rome. Paul knew the prison well,

after all he used to be the one who hunted down the Christians, putting them into prison. Now, he’s the one who’s being imprisoned for speaking out on his faith – his faith in Christ. Talk about a twist of irony and a dramatic transformation! Even though Paul might have lost his earthly freedom while in prison, but he has gained his freedom in heaven.

 In his letter to the Philippians, Paul shared about his conversion experience in Christ – the before and after. He claimed his personal lineage and privileges of being a Jew, tracing his root to the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew born of Hebrew, and a Pharisee. He followed all the law has handed down through Moses and worked his way into the elite inner circle of synagogue. Paul wasn’t trying to show-off his credentials as a devout Jew. Those were all pretty impressive qualifications. You could say that he has made it to the top. However, there was also the flip side of all of these credentials and qualifications. God sought him out and asked him to surrender all that he had earned and joined God on this race to lead others into salvation.

 As Paul wrote so passionately throughout this letter to the Philippians…whatever “gains”, whatever credentials or accomplishments that he had earned, they were all counted as “loss” compared to the new faith that he has discovered through Christ. He was no longer the person whom he used to be before. He was willing to give all of that up with his new found identity and relationship through Christ. God had done a new thing, a new beginning in his life.

 In Paul’s other letter to the early church in Corinth, Paul also wrote, “*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. 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. 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. 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. I do it all for the sake of the gospel, so that I may share in its blessings****.”[[1]](#footnote-1)*

As we can see, it’s not about him, but it’s all about Christ! His personal loss is Christ’s gain. Paul was willing to become whatever God required of him for the sake of leading others into Christ. Furthermore, Paul humbly reminded many of his followers **NOT to imitate what he has done, but follow and imitate Christ instead**.[[2]](#footnote-2) Only Christ is perfect, seek Christ and not him…for he himself was a sinner, a forgiven sinner nevertheless, under the grace and mercy of God.

 Come to think of it, how many of us can really say the same thing? We all have our own faith journey to navigate through. Some of us have gone through some rough patches and trials in life. By the virtue of our baptism, God has made a covenant with us not for what we have done but for who we are and what we believe in. God has pledged to cheer us on as we labor towards finishing the race that Christ has started. Every time we stumble, God was willing to pick us up and encourage us to get back on our feet.

As proclaimed through the prophet Isaiah, God reminded us *not to remember the former things, or consider the things of old. For God is about to do a new thing; God will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert.[[3]](#footnote-3)*

 Through our baptism in Christ, we as a church embark on our collective faith together. We all have our own cross to bear, our own wilderness to journey through in order to reach the Promised Land. All of us are called to participate in this common mission of God.

**Throughout this season of Lent, we are invited to put aside all of our credentials, our qualifications that define us and shape us into who we are. Check our personal pride and ego at the door as we stand before God’s righteousness as dust and ashes.** God has made us His own, by sending His only Son to carry OUR crosses. Christ has endured OUR suffering and has died OUR deaths. The cross the He took upon Himself was ours!

**The resurrection that we’ve witnessed in Christ is also the resurrection that we can all look forward to, when we have finished running this race with Christ cheering us at the finish line.**

Therefore, we must ***forget what lies behind and strain forward to what lies ahead. We press on toward the goal of reaching that heavenly prize which God has prepared for us.[[4]](#footnote-4)* We must press on until Christ returns once again! We must press on!** In the name of God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit, Amen.

1. *1 Corinthians 9:19-23*  [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. *I Corinthians 11:1* [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. *Isaiah 43:18-19* [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. *Philippians 3:13-14* [↑](#footnote-ref-4)