

**MEDITATIONS FROM
ORIOLE – YORK MILLS
UNITED CHURCH**



Oriole-York Mills United Church, Front View

**“Life is a Long Distance Run:
Parts 4 to 5**

by Reverend Chris T. Miller

This is one in a series of selected sermons and resources from Oriole – York Mills United Church. It is offered as a public service in the spirit of sharing and strengthening our Christian faith. We hope readers benefit from the insights they provide.

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Life Is a Long-Distance Run: Go for the Goal!

4. Reach for the Goal

Philippians 3:12-14 (The Message), Hebrews 12:1-4 (GNB)

In ancient times, one focus in life was the “hearth.” The “hearth” or the fireplace symbolised the home because it was the centre of warmth, food being cooked and the family gathering to read, chat and sing. Interestingly, *focus* is the Latin word for “hearth.”

The 15th-century German astronomer Johannes Kepler (1571–1630) used this word “focus” to designate the point – the focal point -- at which a curved parabolic mirror concentrates light rays from the sun to cause burning. So the “focus” was, literally, “a place of fire” -- or fireplace!

This ability to focus -- to stay centred and to concentrate intensely -- is a key factor in Olympic competition, not only at the actual time of the event but also in the days, weeks, months and even years leading up to when the Games are held.

Champions are marked by this burning fire – their passion. You can see it in their eyes. Certainly this was true whenever I watched an Olympic event in the past couple of weeks – whether diving, swimming, running, hurdles, pole-vaulting. In all the events, *all* the athletes focused intensely on what needed to be done. Their task, their challenge, their calling was not something casual. It had been their focus or burning passion (fire!) – for years in most cases – and truly epitomizes who they are.



Gold medal winners are *not* like the Iranian boxer Ali Kazemi who was disqualified at the 1992 Barcelona Olympic Games because (Can you believe this?) he had forgotten to bring his boxing gloves! That same year, Canadian yachtsman Hank Lammens was disqualified for not remembering to bring his life-jacket. And those who watched the four-person relays for both the men and women in Beijing must have wondered if the U.S. teams were totally focused on the moment when they dropped their batons.

The Apostle Paul was always talking about his focus. Here's how *The Message* Bible puts it in Paul's letter to the Philippians, Chapter 3, verses 12 and 13:

“I'm not saying that I have this all together, that I have it made. But I am well on my way, reaching out for Christ, who has so wondrously reached out for me.



Beccafumi, Domenico. C. 1515

Friends, don't get me wrong: By no means do I count myself an expert in all of this, *but I've got my eye on the goal*, where God is beckoning us onward -- to Jesus. I'm off and running and I'm not turning back. So let's keep focused on that goal, those of us who want everything God has for us."

What is the goal God is beckoning us to in our life? The goal is simple rather than complex. The goal God is beckoning us toward is this: **living by faith in God through Jesus Christ.**

There is no other more pressing goal in life than this for the followers of Jesus. It is living our lives by faith *right now* in the presence of God and then living in God's presence *beyond now -- in eternity*.

For the past three weeks, we have been talking about “Going for the Goal” – or even for the “gold.” But rather than setting our sights on Olympic gold, we have been looking at what it takes to become spiritual champions in this long-distance run of life we are in. We looked at the lives of a number of spiritual champions – those who have finished their races -- the “great cloud of witnesses” who line the grandstands of heaven and cheer for you and me as we attempt to run our own races. We noted that it is critical for us to strip off the sin and the weights that distract us from God and trip us up in our Christian life. And we also noted the importance of persevering through the difficulties that life throws at us as we run the race toward the finish line and wonderful goal that God has marked out for us. There are copies of these messages on the table as you leave the entrance lounge. It is our prayer that you will find these spiritually helpful.

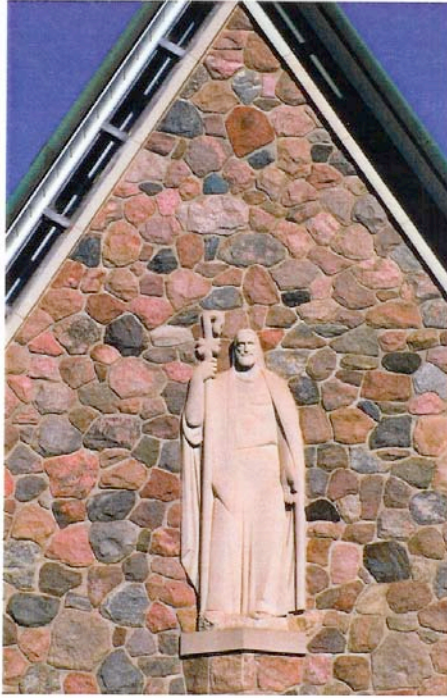
Now the writer of Hebrews, our coach in this season of training, instructs us to “fix our eyes on Jesus, on whom our faith depends from beginning to end.”

Athletes, for better or for worse, become heroes for those who look up to them. As a result of the 2008 Beijing Olympics, how many aspiring young swimmers will want to “be – or swim -- like Michael Phelps”? How many aspiring young runners will want to “be – or run -- like Usain Bolt of Jamaica”? All of them! Well, God has given us the perfect role model to look to for our own individual races -- Jesus Christ. In fact, when it comes to a spiritual champion who finishes the race, there is no one else in

the entire world – or in history -- who even comes a close second to Jesus Christ.

In one of his sermons, James Francis wrote what has come to be called “One Solitary Life”:

“He was born in an obscure village, the child of a peasant woman. He grew up in still another village where he worked in a carpenter shop until he was thirty. Then for three years he was an itinerant preacher. He never had a family of his own or owned a home. He never travelled 200 miles from the place he was born. He never set foot inside a big city. He never wrote a book. He never held an office. He never went to college. He did none of the things that usually accompany greatness. He had no credentials but himself. While he was still a young man, the tide of popular opinion turned against him. His friends deserted him. He was turned over to his enemies and went through the mockery of a trial. He was nailed to a cross between two thieves. While he was dying, his executioners gambled for his clothing, the only property he had on Earth. When he was dead, he was laid in a borrowed grave through the pity of a friend. Those are the facts of his human life. Then He was raised from the dead.



Today we look back across [2,000 years] and ask: What kind of trail has he left across the centuries? When we try to sum up his influence, all the armies that ever marched, all the parliaments that ever sat, all the kings that ever reigned are absolutely trivial in their influence on humankind compared with that of this one solitary life.”

What is there about Jesus’ life that makes us *want to fix our eyes on him*? Without question, it is **his love**. One of the first songs we often learn in Sunday school is “Jesus Loves Me.” From the moment Jesus began his ministry, we see his love as he touches those who are suffering, heals those who are sick,

welcomes those who are outsiders or outcasts, feeds those who are physically and spiritually hungry, comforts those who bear deep hurt and bitterness, forgives those who sinned against God and their neighbours.

It was this love and compassion that drew H. A. Hodges to God. Especially the image of “the foot-washing God.”



Christ Washing the Apostles' Feet
Simon Bening Flemish, Bruges, about 1525 - 1530

Friday's *Our Daily Bread* tells his story. Hodges was a brilliant young professor of philosophy at Oxford University. Questions about the existence of God often troubled him. One day as he strolled down the street, his attention was gripped by a simple picture in an art store window. It showed Jesus kneeling to wash his disciples' feet. Hodges knew the story recorded in John Chapter 13 – God incarnate washing human feet. But suddenly the meaning of that scene gripped the heart of this professor: God – *God!* – humbling himself to that lowliest of tasks! Hodges thought: "If God is like that, then that God shall my God!" Seeing that painting was one of the circumstances that caused this philosophy professor to surrender his life to God. And Jesus Christ became the focus of Hodges' life.

Yet nothing demonstrated Jesus' love for people more than **his death**. He willingly went to a horrible, undeserved cross of shame and suffering in order to die – to take the penalty for our sin. One of his followers, the Apostle John wrote, "This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us" (1 John 3:16). And so we will sing the hymn this morning: "What wondrous love is this, O my soul, that caused the Lord of bliss to bear the dreadful curse for my soul." In verses 2 and 3 of Chapter 12, the writer of Hebrews wrote: "Jesus was willing to die a shameful death on the cross because of the joy he knew would be his afterward. . . . Think about all Jesus endured when sinful people did such terrible things to him so that you don't become weary and give up" (12:2–3, *NLT*).

Our congregational mission statement says we exist "to follow Jesus' footsteps." That sounds very similar to what the Apostle John told those early followers of Jesus in 1 John 2:6: "Those who say that they remain in union with God should live just as Jesus Christ did" (*Good News Bible*). *The Message Bible* says it

this way: “Anyone who claims to be intimate with God ought to live the same kind of life Jesus lived.”

A few years ago, I would occasionally notice a bumper sticker or someone wearing a T-shirt or a bracelet with the initials WWJD. I haven't seen any recently. But maybe these initials should come back. They stand for **What Would Jesus Do?** When we talk about following in Jesus' footsteps, the simple and practical question “What would Jesus do?” may be significant to ask ourselves. In this way, our focus in life becomes more and more on Jesus Christ and the way he lived on Earth.

Although . . . *some* may not find it as useful as they might wish! Remember the advice columnist Ann Landers? She wrote about a 16-year-old boy who looked out at the driveway and did not see the car he had expected his father to give him. When he asked his father, his dad reminded him about the length of his hair, his neglect of Bible reading and the sad state of his grades in school. So the young man got busy. At the end of the semester, he approached his father again. He had a report card that showed considerable improvement. But his father shook his head and commented again on the length of his hair. The 16-year-old protested. He reminded his dad he had been reading the Bible and noticed that Jesus had long hair. [Although I have to say I am not sure which book, chapter and verse he found that in!] His father responded, “You keep on reading that Bible, son, and you'll find out that Jesus *walked* nearly everywhere he went!”

How might we focus on our goal of fixing our eyes on Jesus as the book of Hebrews tells us? Let me suggest a few spiritual exercises that may help to sharpen our focus. These are not new but they could be useful reminders for our long-distance run.

(1) *Begin and end the day with prayer and meditation.* I know that if I don't intentionally take the time to look to Jesus especially at the beginning of my day, something always jumps in and steals my focus. I chose our opening hymn this morning because it speaks of training our minds at the beginning of the day to go immediately to Jesus Christ:

When morning gilds the skies, my heart awakening cries:
May Jesus Christ be praised!
Alike at work or prayer to Jesus I repair:
May Jesus Christ be praised!
Be this while life is mine, my canticle divine:
May Jesus Christ be praised!
Be this the eternal song, through all the ages long,
May Jesus Christ be praised!

My wife's 96-year-old mother starts her day by singing in her mind "Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God Almighty." You probably have your own favourite hymn – perhaps something more contemporary.

(2) *Do a slow read of one of the four Gospels.* My wife, Marg, suggested the Gospel of Luke in the summer edition of our church's newsletter *The Oriole*. In our mid-week group this fall, we will be studying the Gospel of Mark. So maybe you would like to get a head start. As you read, ask yourself the following questions: What did Jesus do? What did he say? Where do I need to change my life so I am following Jesus "more nearly," as the old song "Day by Day" says?

(3) *Read a daily devotional guide.* It can encourage and inspire your thinking about God in the midst of the issues you face in your life. We still have some free copies of *Our Daily Bread* on the table in the lounge.

(4) *Keep asking “What would Jesus do?”* WWJD. This will radically change the focus of your life, your attitudes and the way you go about your work, your play and even your worship.

That is what happened to Blaise Pascal. Yesterday’s *Our Daily Bread* tells his story. Pascal, the brilliant 17th-century French intellectual, made significant contributions in the fields of science and mathematics. He established the groundwork for the development of mechanical calculators, a forerunner of computers, and for modern hydraulic operations. As a young man, Pascal had an encounter with Jesus Christ. This life-changing experience motivated him to refocus his study from science and math to theology. He continued his work in science and mathematics, becoming a world-renowned scientist, but his focus was on God. This is evident in his prayer – a prayer we could use today:

Lord, help me to do great things as though they were little,
since I do them with your power;
and little things as though they were great,
since I do them in Your name.

The goal before us is attainable. **If we keep ourselves focused on Jesus Christ, in time we will become more and more like him. And that is what the race – this life -- is all about.** It is another way of understanding where God is beckoning us – **to live by faith in God through Jesus Christ.**

Olympic athletes run, walk, swim, dive, jump, bike and wrestle for the gold medal. On the other hand, we run our race to hear the words “Well done, good and faithful servant!” The difference in our long-distance spiritual run is that *all who finish* are winners –

all who finish are champions. Because our lives are more like a marathon than a sprint, to finish our race with our faith still focused on Jesus brings great joy to the great crowd of witnesses who are watching us – and even to God! And because the joy of having us with him in God’s presence was “the joy he knew would be his afterward,” Jesus did not give up but endured the Cross. Our own faithfulness in the midst of life’s difficulties and our continued focus on God in the race of our lives is very like, Paul would say, the burning passion Olympic athletes have as they go for the gold in their events.

Let me conclude with a story from Eugene Peterson. He is the one who translated *The Message* Bible. He wrote:

My two sons are both rock climbers, and I have listened to them plan their ascents. They spend as much or more time planning their climbs as in the actual climbing. They meticulously plot their route and then, as they climb, [they] put in what they call "protection" -- pitons hammered into small crevices in the rock face, with attached ropes that will arrest a quick descent to death. Rock climbers who fail to put in protection have short climbing careers.



Upper Pitch of Sea of Vapours, Canadian Rockies

Then Peterson continues:

Our pitons or "protection" come as we remember and hold on to those times when we have experienced God's faithfulness in our lives. Every answered prayer, every victory, every storm that has been calmed by his presence is a piton which keeps us from falling, losing hope or, worse yet, losing our faith. Every

piton in our life is an example of God's faithfulness to us.... As we ascend in the kingdom of God, we also realize that each experience, each victory is only a piton -- a stepping stone toward our ultimate goal of finishing the race and receiving the crown of glory.

(E. Peterson, *The Unnecessary Pastor, Rediscovering the Call*, Eerdmans, 2000)

My friends, we are in a spiritual race that is for the long haul. The crown of glory awaiting us is that we will experience the very resurrection life of Christ Jesus in the presence of a loving God for all eternity. We are in a spiritual marathon that requires courage, perseverance and trust. The goal of this race is attainable. And there is great joy to be gained as we race well together toward the finish line in the presence of a joy-filled God.

So let's keep our eyes on *Jesus*, who both began and finished his race like the race we are in. Let's be open to all that God has for us *and look forward* to all that God has for us.

May it be so for you and for me.

Rev. Chris Miller

August 24, 2008

Life Is a Long-Distance Run: Go for the Goal!

5. “Finishing Well”

Psalm 73, Hebrews 12:1-3 (*The Message Bible*)

Well, the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games have ended. And the Beijing Paralympics are set to begin next Saturday. In our worship services this month, we have talked about our lives being more like a long-distance marathon than a short sprint. Each of the past four weeks has focused on one feature of our run: Remember the Witnesses, Remove Any Hindrances, Run With Endurance and Reach for the Goal. Today we conclude the series with the hope of finishing our marathon, having run it well.

At the 1964 Tokyo Olympics, the words of the modern Olympic Creed were spelled out in lights:

“The most important thing in the Olympic Games is not the win but to take part; just as the most important thing in life is not the triumph but the struggle. The essential thing is not to have conquered but to have fought well.”

These words of the Olympic Creed are attributed to Baron Pierre de Coubertin, the founder of the modern Olympic Games. They go back to the summer of 1908.

In the first week of the Olympic Games this summer, I am not sure Canadians -- at least not Canada's media -- took that attitude. I did not see this creed displayed anywhere but I could have easily missed it. Didn't we wonder that first week if our Canadian athletes would win any medal at all? And wasn't that the point of it all -- to win -- to be winners? Well, I am not here to argue the politics of how many medals our athletes ought to have

won. That's for coffee shop and local pub conversations and Internet blogs.

But I am here to talk about winning -- being spiritual winners -- in our marathon run of life. So as I think about our life's marathon, I would modify the Olympic Creed.

I believe the most important things in life are both the struggle *and* the triumph. If the essential thing is to have fought well, then to have fought well in our spiritual marathon means we will also conquer the hurdles in our way and, *ultimately*, triumph.

Asaph was the author of Psalm 73. He was one of the musicians whom King David appointed to oversee the music of worship (1 Chronicles 6:39) and who sang at the dedication of King Solomon's magnificent Temple (2 Chronicles 5:12). Asaph's experience was that life was like a marathon – not on a smooth course like the one in Beijing but a marathon marked with hurdles too! He tried to run a race that was faithful to God but life was difficult – there was always another hurdle to leap over.

Asaph watched others who didn't care a whit about God. Some spoke out boldly against God in arrogant unbelief. Some were cruel and unjust to others. Yet they didn't seem to have any big obstacles in their lives. They had an easy, straight run while Asaph kept facing one hurdle after another. He could not understand this. It didn't seem fair and it didn't seem right. And at one point in his life, he didn't see that believing in God and remaining faithful to God was of any benefit to him.

Asaph almost gave up. He almost gave up his faith in God. He blamed God for everything that happened to him. Although he did not spread his doubts near and far to everyone within earshot, he did give God an earful. In retrospect, Asaph says he was bitter

and ignorant and even like a beast to God. But he took his confusion and his anger to the right place – directly to God. And he went to God with his whole troubled heart and mind.

Asaph *did* finish his marathon of faith! He did not give up on God. He made it over all the hurdles. And he finished well. He finished well because he finished *with God* and not against God. And that is the fundamental meaning of finishing well in our marathon of life too. In fact, Asaph says he finished *close to God!*

Asaph is one of those nameless witnesses in Hebrews Chapter 11 – one of the pioneers, one of the veterans in the faith who struggled and suffered and yet remained faithful to God to the end. We can look to these spiritual champions who are cheering us on while we are still running our race. Because many, like Asaph, faced hurdles as we do.

Some of Asaph’s hurdles are very similar to the hurdles of faith we encounter today. Let me explain one hurdle this way:

We believe God is good. But how are we to understand God’s goodness when violent, oppressive people get their way in this world? How can we believe God is good to the good-hearted when they get it in the neck and the bad guys live in ease and prosperity? How can we believe God is good when innocent children all over the world are exploited and abused?

Asaph *almost* stopped running at this hurdle. In the psalm, he said something like this: “I *almost missed* seeing the goodness of God. I was always looking the other way. I was bitter and envious of the pretentious, the arrogant, the pampered and overfed and the bullies who always seemed to get their way.” That hurdle of the prosperity of the wicked and the suffering of

good people *almost* stopped Asaph in his tracks. But he kept running his marathon. Why did he keep going? How was it that, despite the emotional, intellectual and spiritual difficulty he experienced in his crisis of faith, he did not drop out of his marathon of faith?

Let me set up Asaph's response in the following manner because I believe this is a perspective of the hurdles that many today – even in the church -- do not understand:

For those who do not believe there is a good God who wants to be involved with this Earth and its people, then these questions won't matter. They will have to find some other answer to the issue of good and evil.

But Asaph was clearly a believer in God. That was why he was in such emotional and spiritual turmoil. I can hear Asaph shouting to himself: "What's going on here? Is God out to lunch? Nobody's tending the store. The wicked get by with everything; they have it made, piling up riches. I've been stupid to play by the rules; what has it gotten me? A long run of bad luck, that's what -- a slap in the face every time I walk out the door" (Psalm 73:11-14, *The Message*). When Asaph tried to figure out the answer *by himself*, all he got was a splitting headache, as *The Message* Bible puts it. That's when Asaph came to his senses and took all his hard questions, his complaints, his confusion, his frustration and his anger to God. I suspect he fell on his knees at the front of the sanctuary and cried out to God for all he was worth.

When we come to a hurdle – a crisis of faith -- in our lives, what are the possibilities before us? (1) We can slow down and quit. We can stop running the race of faith and simply forget about God. (2) We can turn around and retrace our steps or deliberately

go off in a completely different direction – away from God. (3) Or we can jump over the hurdle, or run round it, or plough right through it and keep on going. Asaph didn't stop – he only slowed down for a time. He didn't go off in an entirely other direction either. Instead, he picked up the hurdle and said to God: "I've got to talk about this with you." And God said: "I have been waiting for you, my friend. You are right: we need to talk." (That's the version according to Chris Miller!)

When Asaph went to God with his whole heart and soul, God showed his own heart to Asaph. And Asaph came to know God – to really know God – personally in the midst of his crisis. He discovered that knowing God was what was most important -- and most wonderful! -- in life. It was at this time in his life that Asaph learned God was close to him and he could be close to God – even in the most difficult times. He learned that when he went to God for help, God would take his hand and help him over the hurdles. He learned that God would lead him when he listened to what God had to say. Asaph experienced God's presence with such reality in his earthly life that he exclaimed: "You are all I want on earth! You are all I want in heaven!"

Many other biblical characters had the same experience of God. Like Job who, despite all his suffering, said: "I admit I once lived by rumours of you; now I have it all firsthand – from my own eyes and ears!" Like Habakkuk who could rejoice in knowing God no matter what was happening to him or going on around him. Like many people today who know what Asaph, Job and Habakkuk are talking about. And we, too, can know God personally and experience God's close presence when we seek God with our whole heart as these pioneers of faith did.

God gave Asaph another answer that put the hurdle into its proper perspective. And Asaph made it over that hurdle. But I see

that answer as another hurdle – not for Asaph but for us. **I believe God’s answer to Asaph has become a hurdle for many in the church.**

In our secular culture, many have difficulty believing there will be more for us when our marathon run in life is finished – that there really is a wonderful, real life in the presence of God awaiting us beyond this life. In his little book *The Problem of Pain*, English professor and author C. S. Lewis was clear and straightforward about this when he wrote:

We are very shy nowadays of even mentioning Heaven. We are afraid of the jeer about “pie in the sky,” and of being told that we are trying to “escape from the duty of making a happy world here and now into dreams of a happy world elsewhere.”

But [Lewis continues] either there is “pie in the sky” or there is not. *If there is [no Heaven], then Christianity is false*, for this doctrine is woven into its whole fabric. If there is, then this truth, like any other, must be faced, whether it is useful at political meetings or no.

Jesus was very clear about preparing a place – *a real place* – for his disciples after he was raised from the dead and went to be with his Father in Heaven. At funerals and memorial services, we often hear the Scripture from the 14th chapter of the Gospel of John:

Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me. In my Father’s house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also.



Christ Taking Leave of His Apostles Duccio di Buoninsegna, 1308-11

When they faced their own hurdles after Jesus ascended to Heaven, Jesus' followers remembered what He taught them. They believed what he said about Heaven. They based their hope, their teaching and their very lives on what Jesus said and did. And although Jesus' disciples and many of his early followers faced persecution and martyrdom, they all took Jesus at his word. They believed in a real place called Heaven and looked forward to seeing Jesus face to face again. And, today, those who suffer persecution for their faith all over the world say that what keeps

22

them going is Jesus' promise of Heaven – and being in God's presence forever.

Our congregation's mission statement speaks of "following Jesus' footsteps." Do we base our lives and our hope on what *Jesus* said and did? Or are we distracted by the conflicting things that others say? As we follow Jesus through our marathon of life and face our own hurdles, do we, like Jesus' disciples, look forward to the finish line? We can -- with true hope because Jesus said he has prepared that joy-filled place of love in the presence of God for us too – a place called the kingdom of God, the kingdom of Heaven or, simply, Heaven.

Heaven mattered to Asaph because things would be put right then. The proud, the arrogant, the oppressors, the abusers, the cruel and the unjust – those who refused to repent and respond to God's offer of mercy would ultimately find themselves where they chose to be -- outside God's presence. But Asaph would be able to enjoy God's presence forever.

Seminary professor Lewis Smedes used to ask his students if they wanted to go to Heaven when they died. Everyone would raise a hand. Then he'd ask, "Be honest now -- who would like to go *today*?" A few would raise their hands slowly, giving what they thought was the correct answer but looking around to see if they were the only ones. Most students wanted a rain check. They were ready to die -- but not today.

Then Prof. Smedes would ask who would like to see the world set straight once and for all tomorrow: "No more common colds, no more uncommon cancers. Hungry people would have plenty. No one would lift a finger to harm another. We would be at peace with everyone, even with ourselves. Anybody interested in that?" There would be a flurry of hand-lifting. Then the professor would

point out that, if that new world is what they really wanted, then Heaven is where they'd like to be.

I don't know when my marathon of life will end. My hand is raised with those who are ready -- but not today. I think it's because I believe I still have some work to do to finish well. Like Asaph, I still want to tell more people what God is doing so they too will finish well. I also believe that following in Jesus' footsteps for me means I want to continue Jesus' mission, which he described as (Luke 4):

God's Spirit is on me;
he's chosen me to preach the Message of good news to the
poor,
sent me to announce pardon to prisoners and
recovery of sight to the blind,
to set the burdened and battered free,
to announce, "This is God's year to act!"

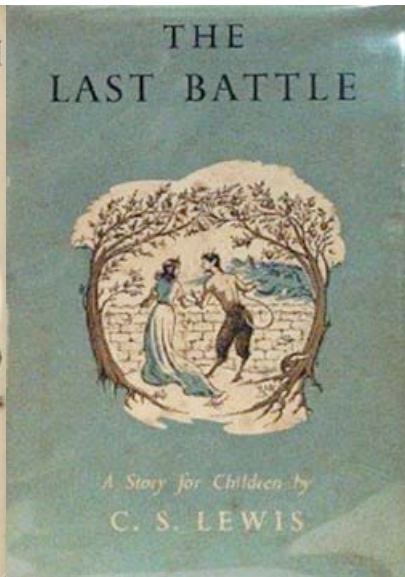
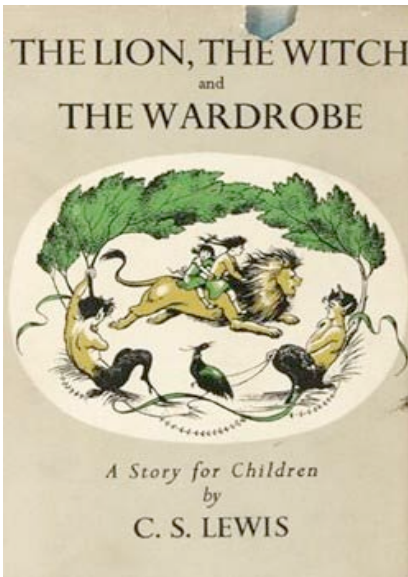
On the final page of the final book of C. S. Lewis's *The Chronicles of Narnia*, in *The Last Battle*, some of the children who have been to Narnia lament that they must once again return to their homeland -- the Shadowlands. But Aslan (the lion who represents Jesus) has the best news of all for them:

[Aslan said to the children] "You do not yet look so happy as I mean you to be."

Lucy said, "We're so afraid of being sent away, Aslan. And you have sent us back into our own world so often."

"No fear of that," said Aslan. "Have you not guessed?"

Their hearts leaped and a wild hope rose within them.



First and Last Books in the Chronicles of Narnia

“There *was* a real railway accident,” said Aslan softly. “Your father and mother and all of you are -- as you used to call it in the Shadowlands -- dead. The term is over: the holidays have begun. The dream has ended; this is the morning.”

And as he spoke he no longer looked to them like a lion; but the things that began to happen after that were so great and beautiful that I cannot write them. And for us this is the end of all the stories, and we can most truly say that they all lived happily ever after. But for them it was only the beginning of the real story. All their life in this world and all their adventures in Narnia had only been the cover and the title page: now at last they were beginning Chapter One of the Great Story, which no one on earth has read: which goes on forever: in which every chapter is better than the one before.

My friends, let's continue to run this marathon of life in God's presence on Earth as long as we have breath. Let's continue to remove any hindrances that distract us from God and run with perseverance and with hope. Let us always reach for the goal of living for God and trusting in God even when we face difficult hurdles we don't understand. Let's ask for God's help as Asaph did and jump over, run around or plough through the hurdles. Let's so run our marathon that we will *finish well* and enter the joy-filled presence of our loving God.

May it be so for you and for me. Amen.

Rev. Chris Miller
August 31, 2008



Oriole-York Mills United Church, Rear View