



Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. **AMEN**

During the Civil Rights Movement in America, there was an expression that became popular after a song by the same name. "Keep Your Eyes on the Prize, Hold On". This became an anthem to many African Americans during the 1960's. This expression and the song date back to another popular song from the early 1900's named "Gospel Plow". "Keep Your Eyes on the Prize" was to inspire people to keep working for racial equality despite the threats and violence that erupted around and towards them. Many singers including Bob Dylan, Joan Baez, Bruce Springsteen, and Peter Seeger used the lyrics in their music to motivate and unite those in the fight for equal rights. If you listen to different utube videos of this song, you can clearly hear some biblical references.

Our Bible texts for today have the common thread of keeping your eye on the prize. In our New Testament epistle for today, Paul encourages us to remember our citizen ship is in heaven even as we live here on earth. He is telling the good people of Philippi to hold on and stand firm in the Lord.

In the lectionary last week there was the story of the Devil tempting Jesus in the wilderness after a 40 day fast. Three times Satan tempted Jesus to use his Godly powers to do as the Evil one asked. And three times Jesus used

Scripture quotes to show the Devil he was focused on what His Father had sent him to do. The devil finally went away from Jesus when he realized that Jesus had his eyes set on the prize, set on Jerusalem.

Our Luke text this morning seems like it is another temptation for Jesus. The Pharisees are encouraging Jesus to save himself and flee to avoid the wrath of Herod. But Jesus will not be deterred. He is on his way to Jerusalem, to accomplish His mission. He has his eyes set on his rendezvous with the cross. Even though the Pharisees warn Jesus what will happen if he goes to Jerusalem, Jesus continues His path. And don't you love the cryptic answer that Jesus has for Herod. He tells the Pharisees that they should go tell "the fox" Herod that his work is not yet finished. Jesus will continue to cast out demons and cure people for two more days. Then His work will be finished on the third day.

In those two days, Jesus' work is not yet finished. He will continue His ministry of healing and bringing God's love to the people. The threat of Herod will not slow Jesus' kingdom work. Jesus is keeping his eye on the prize. And that prize comes on the third day. The third day is the day of resurrection.

Jesus knows what is going to happen. He knows where He is headed. He is going to Jerusalem, where He knows what is going to happen when he reaches there. Jesus does not need those Pharisees to tell him or to warn him. He will be crucified on a cross. And His ministry will not be overruled by His death. Jesus will rather be defined by His resurrection. His ministry is only perfected in that resurrection. And that is the prize on which He sets his eyes.

What could be a better example for us? We too must keep our eyes on the prize as we live life in such an unstable and threatening world. Paul's words from Philippians ring true as we confront the devil around the next corner and in our sinful thoughts of our own power. The finite world is not the end, as Paul said, our citizenship is in heaven with God. We don't belong to this world. We are only here on a temporary visa if you will, so we can witness to God's unconditional love. We keep our eyes on the prize and remember that we have seen that the resurrection is stronger than death. We know that love conquers all hatred, all division, all differences. We are here to witness to

what we believe for these two days, as we know what happens on the third day.

Hope in the third day, hope in the resurrection will overcome all things and that is exactly what sustained St Paul and all the great witnesses that have gone before us. And so, in faith we keep our eyes on the prize.

I love the image Luke uses to talk about the love God has for us as Jesus tells the disciples that he “desires to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings.” Even though often we seem unwilling to stay in that place of protection, God makes us that offer, over and over again.

In Wisconsin bald eagles have made a big comeback off the endangered species list. In fact, when we first came up to the north woods, I finally got to see one up close. Rodney and I were driving to Hayward for our Walmart run and there was a dead deer on the side of the road with an eagle sitting on top of it, tearing its lifeless flesh with its’ talons. I never realized how large eagles were. And on our way home an hour or two later, there was the eagle still feasting on the same deer. Wondering how they could eat so much. I remembered the videos that were so popular at the time, of an eagle’s nest with eggs in it. In Wisconsin eagles start laying their eggs in late January. The live streaming from these eagle cams is found on the internet where you can watch the eggs hatch and baby eagles appear. It is really amazing to watch those eagles as they are quite the devoted parents. From the pair taking turns sitting on the eggs to keep them warm to feeding their young. Wonder how they did in last week’s ice storm. These birds are undeterred even by weather. They keep their mission in front of them. The welfare of their chicks hatched in the nests are paramount. They keep their eyes on the prize, raising their young, continuing their species.

Just as Jesus gathers all of humanity into his arms on the cross, we are protected from the forces of this world as we wait for the promise of eternal life. By the power of the resurrection, we are saved through God’s grace by faith alone. So, keep your eye on that prize! Hold on for what is to come!

AMEN