

## Cheering Us On

*Preached by Cheryl Williams at Footscray Baptist Church, Aug 14<sup>th</sup>, 2022 (Hebrews 11:29 - 12:2)*

I don't know about you, but lately I have been watching a lot of sport – tennis at Wimbledon, cycling in the Tour De France, the Commonwealth Games especially the swimming, track, javelin and volleyball and of course at this time of the year AFL. Now after two years we have many people in the stands watching, cheering and giving advice to the athletes about how best to go about their craft.

I wonder how the athletes feel? Are they inspired? Are they encouraged? Are they annoyed? Are they distracted? When I used to play tennis every time I hit a forehand for some reason I would kick my leg up (maybe it was about balance), it was a funny little habit. My teammates would sit on the sidelines watching and every time I hit a forehand, they would kick up their legs – very distracting!

Crowds watching on can be fascinating. Before I got really interested in the AFL my Pa would take us to all the Geelong home games. I think back then I was much more interested in the spectators than the actual game, which when you were short was hard to see (these were the days when you stood rather than sat to watch). I would watch the crowd – what were they wearing, who they were barracking for, how did they barrack, were they standing on six empty beer cans so they could see, did they have a thermos of hot tea, what were there reactions to the acts on the field, what colourful language were they using.

Our reading today is about running a race with a crowd cheering on. The best way to run this race is to focus on Jesus who has run this race before. In the grandstand are many others who have also run the race, cheering the participants onwards.

The race of course is the living of our life in God's way, participating in the coming of God's kingdom here on earth, in the here and now, in the present.

As I read, I find myself again checking out the crowd, looking at who is in the grandstand, and it is a pretty interesting bunch we have there.

- a) the Israelite people who were led by Moses in the crossing of the Red Sea to freedom – Moses who'd been taken from his mother and his people to another land as an infant, and now leads his m people back home
- b) Joshua and his friends who circled Jericho until the city fell and then they invaded
- c) Rahab – a woman of the night, a prostitute with a checkered past who hid some enemy spies, and in the end saves them and her family. Rahab, struggling with divided loyalties, who should she side with – her people and certain death or the spies and at the very least save her family. Rahab, a woman we rarely speak of, but who would become a great-great, great grandmother of Jesus, her son is Boaz who marries Ruth

- d) Gideon – who didn't really trust that God would help him win a battle so chose to test God by putting out a fleece to see if it was wet the next morning, dry the one after and wet the next one. He was one of the Judges
- e) Barak – summoned by the only female Judge – Deborah to lead a battle
- f) Samson – of Delilah fame. He falls in love with a foreigner, who is then used to find out what gave Samson his strength, so he could be defeated
- g) Jephthah – another judge and warrior, the son of a prostitute. He promises God that if he wins a battle, he will offer the first thing that comes out of his house as a sacrifice, tragically it was his daughter
- h) David – the shepherd boy turned King, author of many of the Psalms but also adulterer as he has an affair with Uriah's wife
- i) Samuel – dedicated to God as a child by his mother Hannah. He becomes a prophet, Judge, priest, leader
- j) Many others who did amazing things and suffered much – Daniel in the lion's den, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego who are thrown into the fiery furnace and joined by a fourth person (the son of God). And you could add many more from our story of faith.

What a motley crew, all a bit crazy, a bunch of people who did their best to live out their calling and follow their God to the best of their ability. They didn't always get it right, clearly many were flawed individuals, but ultimately, they ran their race, they ran to the best of their ability, they were faithful to how they understood the demands of God on their lives. They dared to do things differently, they were ordinary and yet extraordinary, counter-cultural and people of great courage.

They were all commended for their faith even if they didn't live to see the fruition of their work.

These flawed yet committed and faithful people are our example, they are our inspiration and in God's world are cheering us on as we struggle to understand and live the life God calls us to.

Who else is in the grandstand cheering you on? Whose example of faithful living has had a significant effect on your life?

So, what will it be flawed and faithful saints here at Footscray Baptist Church?

What kind of race are you and we called to run?

Is it like a steeplechase with puddles and hurdles and other obstacles to negotiate? Is it like a marathon where we need to pace ourselves, to have trained well so we can persevere through the sun and the rain, trained well enough so we can endure the painful moments and get to the end? Is it more like a 100m sprint – we just have to gird ourselves and run as fast as we can, all we need to do is focus on Jesus? Is it more like the relay where we need to take the baton from those gone before us and ready ourselves to hand it on to the next person. No matter what the kind of race it requires training, an understanding of tactics and an ability to focus. No matter the kind of race our ancestors in the faith are cheering us on, willing us to succeed.

What kind of legacy of service, of generosity and of love will we leave? How will we encourage those who come after us?

So let's garner our strength, complete the necessary training and preparation, focus and be encouraged by those on the sidelines as we run toward Jesus with all that we have and all that we are, run in the manner he showed us and taught us.