

Text: John 21:20-24

Title: Whose Race Are You Running?

Theme: If we are to finish the race and keep the faith, we must make certain we are on the course intended for us by the one who called us.

I. Finding one's **PLACE**.

In order to be successful in a race, it is important to know what kind of runner you are.

Just as sprinters don't do well at distance, or visa versa, so we must know what course

God has called us to run.

A. Peter had the issue, and Jesus said, "run your own race."

Where would the church be today if Peter had tried to be like John, and John had tried to be like Peter? At the NBC graduation ceremony there is an enactment of soliloquies by graduates portraying apostles. Each one is different, and I assume somewhat suited for the graduate portraying the apostle. Don't lose the importance of that.

B. As the Director of Pensions and Benefits USA part of my responsibility includes reviewing service histories of ministers at the time of retirement. I've noticed something of interest – those who stay with it, who finish the race, do so because they have found "place."

C. When God called you, He called YOU!

II. Finding one's PACE

A. Based on what we know of scripture and tradition about Peter and John, it is fairly safe to say that they ran at a different pace. Peter was a sprinter. John was a distance runner.

B. The course (PLACE) needs to match the PACE. I run one race in competition – a charity race in late August. I am joined by family members, and we make a morning of it. My first time to run in competition I was unfamiliar with the course, and so full of adrenaline my first half was completed in a time well below my best total course goal. At first I was thrilled, and then I realized I had more course than energy. While I accomplished my goal for the race, the last 200 meters were the toughest I'd ever run. My pace had just about ruined my finish.

C. Some churches are on successive sprints. Others are marathoners, and some are middle distance. If you try to make marathoners sprint, you're going to have problems.

III. Finding PERSONAL GRACE.

A. We are very much aware from scripture and tradition that none of the apostles were without shortcomings. And yet Jesus went out of His way to extend unique and abundant grace to each.

B. As someone who runs a bit, I've learned to "listen to my body." As I've aged, it seems to speak more loudly and more often than it used to. I've also learned that sometimes, success requires rest as much as rigor. A few weeks ago, as a failure of not having

warmed up and cooled down appropriately, I had a slight knee injury. It happened that I also had a regularly scheduled physician appointment at that time, and so I asked what I should do. My physician looked at me and said, "If you were a young man whose scholarship depended on it, I'd say play through it. However, at your age, why not just let it heal?"

C. From church history we are aware that when the church is at its worst, grace is usually at its least. If you are to be victorious at your own or a particular church's lowest points, it will be necessary to add extra measures of grace. Without making allowances for sin, there will come a point where you just have to "let it go."

Conclusion:

You can finish the course. You can keep the faith. Thousands before you have. God has promised His presence, regardless of the challenges. Find the PLACE He has for you. Follow the PACE His providence dictates. At every step, move in the GRACE He has extended to each and every one of us.