

The Finish Line

"Therefore since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God." Hebrews 12:1-2

It's May! As a coach and athlete, I particularly love the symbolism of the race shared in these verses from Hebrews, but the heart of this passage rings true for all educators and administrators. Races mean finish lines, and for Lutheran educators, finish lines are all around us.

For some students, this year's finish line is significant as it includes graduation. They will leave our elementary and high schools and move on to the next level of education or the workforce. Athletes are approaching the finish to sports seasons with sights on championships. Students with talents in music and theatre are prepping for final performances, a finish line to demonstrate the skills developed this year. All of these require perseverance to achieve a successful finish and in many cases, the hope of a slower pace during the summer.

Many teachers can tell you the number of days left in the school year—an exciting finish line. In our classrooms, we as educators look at what needs to be accomplished prior to dismissal so our students can be properly equipped academically to move on to the next grade.

Other finish lines are a bit different. Recently, my family has faced the reality of an earthly finish line for my grandfather. As his health declined and he lived his final days in hospice care, friends and family were able to share memories with him and say their goodbyes. Although there was sadness in his last days, through his life-long example, my grandfather and our family focused not on finishing the race, but rather on the message found in verse two of this Hebrews passage. My grandfather did not fear death, for his eyes were on Jesus. Our family misses Gramps' earthly presence, but in focusing on Jesus, we feel comforted knowing that our separation is only temporary, for we will be joined again in heaven.

My grandfather loved cookies, and was known to eat a few in his day. One of the life lessons he taught his grandchildren and great-grandchildren was that if anyone ever asked how many cookies you had eaten, the answer was always "two...the first one and the last one." Reflecting on his life, this mantra reminded me of Christ's declaration: *"I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End."* (Revelation 22:13) Not to suggest that indulging in cookies is biblical, but Christ uses the Alpha and Omega, the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet, to remind us He is both the beginning, for *"in the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God,"* (John 1:1) and end *"the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ."* (2 Peter 1:11) We should fix our eyes on Him, for everything starts and ends with Him, and that ultimately is all that matters.

Even though the finish line of this school year is approaching, other races loom in the future. August will come all too quickly, bringing with it new students and challenges. As educators, we will work to persevere through next year, and through all of our races, it is Jesus, the Alpha and Omega, who continues to be our foundation. As we persevere to impending finish lines and recharge this summer to head back to new starting lines in the fall, look to the counsel of Paul: *"So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in him, rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness."* (Colossians 2:6-7)

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