

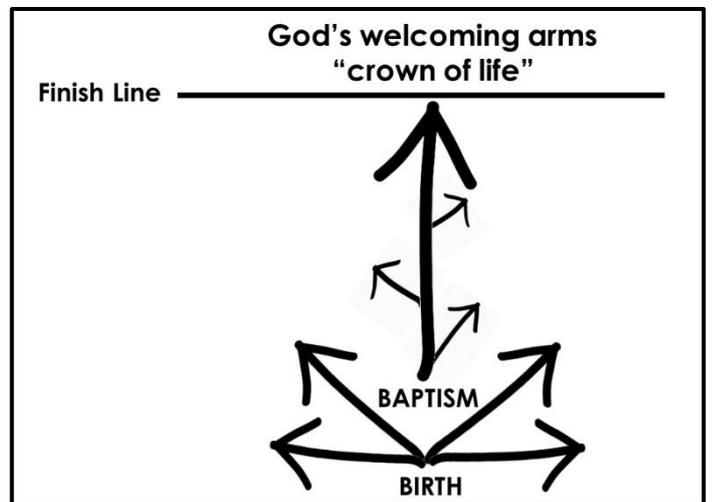
Sunday 20th June 2021
Glynde Lutheran Church
Sermon on Hebrews 12:1 – 3
Theme: “Where’s Wally?”
“Keep your eyes fixed on Jesus!”

Introduction:

Do you remember the *Where’s Wally?* books..... Many of you who have children or grandchildren or nieces or nephews have probably seen these books. The object in these books is to find the figure of Wally in the middle of the picture somewhere....

I want you to do something similar this morning. I want you to find where you are in this diagram that I’ve drawn. I want you to find yourself on this diagram. I want you to mentally put a cross on this diagram to denote where you are....

Oh, I know it’s not much of a diagram.... I’m not a very good drawer, even with a computer *and Angeline* to help me. But hopefully you can see basically what the diagram is about. It is a diagram which represents the race of life.



Point No. 1

In the race of life, we can head off in a whole host of different directions. We can head off in this direction or that, *trying to get things for ourselves so that we will be happy and contented*. The arrows down the bottom of the diagram going out in all directions from our birth are an attempt to represent this. We can go in all sorts of different ways, aiming for all sorts of different things: money, property, wisdom, pleasure, family, being loved, *and the list goes on and on*.

But the reality is that none of these ways will bring us lasting happiness and contentment. They are all good gifts from God, but none of these gifts *in themselves* will bring us lasting happiness or contentment (*cf. Eccles. 1:2-4, 12-18; 2:1-26*).

And none of these ways will bring us to the welcoming arms of God. Sure, all these ways will end with a finishing line, the finishing line of death.... But none of these ways will end with being welcomed home by our dear Father, and receiving “the crown of life”, *of eternal life with God and with Jesus and with all God’s people (Rev. 2:10).*

For there is only one way to the Father, and that is on Jesus’ way. Remember what Jesus said? He said:
I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father, except by me (John 14:4).

It is only when you go on Jesus’ way that you will reach the finishing line, *where God is waiting to welcome us home...*

Point No. 2

Jesus’ way, the way to God, begins with baptism. When a child or an adult is baptised, that child or that adult receives *as a free gift* all that God has made possible for us through the suffering and the death of His Son, Jesus, for us.

On the cross, Jesus, God’s Son, took the blame and the punishment that we deserve for our sins: *for the things that we’ve done to hurt one another, and others, and God.*

When we are baptised, God gives to us His forgiveness, His Holy Spirit *to live in us and to change us to be like Him*, and the inheritance of eternal life. In short, when we are baptised we each become God’s forgiven child (*John 3:5; Acts 2:38; 1 Cor. 6:19; 12:13; Gal. 3:26-27; Titus 3:5*).

And it’s wonderful to be God’s child, isn’t it!?

It’s wonderful to know peace of mind, *because you know that you are forgiven by God for Jesus’ sake (Rom. 3:28; 5:1; 8:1)*, to have purpose and meaning in life, *because you know through Jesus that life’s all about learning to love*, and it great to have an inner joy that no one can take away, *because you know where you are headed: home to be with the Father, in the Father’s Kingdom..* All this is ours through Baptism. But Baptism is only the start of the journey along Jesus’ way....

Point No. 3

It's wonderful being a God's forgiven child, *through our Baptism and our faith in Jesus as our Saviour....* But that doesn't mean that life is easy as Christian. That doesn't mean that going along Jesus' way is easy. It's not. It's a hard struggle. It's like running a cross country race towards a goal, *towards a finishing line.*

I don't know if you've done much running in your life. I did some at High School, and some when I played football. Cross-country running is particularly hard. Not only do you have to keep running, but you've got to make sure that you stay on the right track, and not take wrong turns....

And when you're running a cross-country race, it's easier to run if you keep your eyes fixed on where you are running to. For example, if you and I were running a cross-country race from here to the top of Mount Lofty, we wouldn't get lost as long as we stayed focused on Mount Lofty and the TV towers in the distance, *because they stand out and keep reminding us of where we are going and what we are on about.*

It's the same with going on Jesus' way....

If we keep the cross of Jesus in our focus *and the empty tomb alongside it*, then we won't go astray. The cross of Jesus reminds us *as we run the race of life:*

* **How much God loves us**

"For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that whoever believes in him may not be lost but have eternal life"
(John 3:16)

* **That Jesus died "for our sins"**

"I passed on to you what I received, which is of the greatest importance: that Christ died for our sins, as written in the Scripture (1 Cor. 15:3).

* **How God wants us to live our life**

"If anyone wants to come with me, he must forget self, carry his cross, and follow me" (Mark 8:34).

And the empty tomb reminds us that just as Jesus was raised to life again, so will we!!

When Jesus comes again in glory at the Last Day, he will raise us from the dead, give us new resurrection bodies like his, and take us home to be with him forever (*2 Thess. 4:13-18*).

Always keep the cross of Jesus *and the empty tomb* in your sight as you run the race of life! If you don't, you run the risk of taking a wrong turn, and wandering off from the way to God.

Point No. 4

And always keep Jesus himself in your sight, as he walks before you and leads you along the way towards the finish line.

Listen again to what the writer of the letter to the Hebrews says:

As for us, we have this large crowd of witnesses around us. So then, let us rid ourselves of everything that gets in the way, and of the sin which holds on to us so tightly, and let us run with determination the race that lies before us. Let us keep our eyes fixed on Jesus, on whom our faith depends from beginning to end... (*Heb. 12:1-2*).

Always keep Jesus before, as you run the race of life... I will always remember that this is what Pastor Robert Voigt said to us at Synod, when he finished his stint as District President

or Bishop.... He said to us:

“Always keep your eyes fixed on JESUS!!”

By the way, that's why we give a potplant when a child is baptised: to remind the parents and the family, *and to remind each of us afresh*, that for a child to grow in faith, that child needs to have Jesus before his or her eyes.

For a child to grow in faith, *for a child to continue along Jesus' way*, he or she needs to be told about Jesus, to have Jesus' stories read to him or her *say from “The Beginners Bible”*, and to come along with parents to Church and Lighthouse....

And as our children grow to school age, and into their teenage years, they need to have Jesus firmly in their sight, *so that they stay on Jesus' way, and don't drift off and forget him and forget their Father in heaven.*

So we who are parents, and we who are grandparents and uncles and aunties and friends, need to encourage our young people to read their Bible often, to pray constantly, and to get together regularly with other Christians in worship and at Lighthouse, at Junior Youth, and so on....

We who are adults also need to have Jesus and constantly in front of us, *beckoning us to follow him*, as we run the race of life along Jesus' way. Like our children, we need to regularly read our Bible, *or to listen to it or watch on apps on our phone or ipad or whatever*. We need to spend time praying to God; and we need to get together regularly with other Christians, *so that they can encourage us on our walk with Jesus....*

Always be aware of the things that can take your focus away from Jesus, *and from his cross....* Satan will put all sorts of distractions in front of your eyes and mine, anything to get our focus away from Jesus and his cross. He will use distractions like our work, our house, possessions, money, status, the need for relaxation time, sport, and the list goes on. Satan will use anything in order to take our eyes away from Jesus *and his cross (Matt. 6:19-25; 1 Tim. 6:6-10)*.

And sadly, it works. I have known many people travelling on God's way, who no longer worship because of work pressures or sport on Sundays, or the need to sleep in on Sunday mornings (*see Appendix*).

I know many people whose success by worldly standards has taken them away from focusing on Jesus before them, and on his cross *and the empty tomb....*

And sometimes it is the opposite to success that leads people to give up going on Jesus' way: namely hard times, suffering, troubles, and the like. That's what it seems to be in the case of the people to whom the writer of our Bible reading is writing.

Listen again to what he says in the last half of our Bible reading:

He did not give up because of the cross! On the contrary, because of the joy that was waiting for him, he thought nothing of the disgrace of dying on the cross, and he is now seated at the right-hand side of God's throne.

Think of what he went through; how he put up with so much hatred from sinners! So don't let yourselves become discouraged and give up (Heb. 12:1-3).

Point No. 5

And if ever you find yourself drifting off God's track, or worse still find yourself somewhere off to the side of God's track, don't despair! *It's not the end of the world!* God, our Father in heaven, is loving, and merciful, and compassionate. He loves you, and will *always* welcome you back, no matter what (*Luke 15:11-24*).

God's forgiveness is always available to us....

Thank God! We can always come back to Jesus' track, we can ask for God's forgiveness for Jesus' sake, and then strive to keep Jesus, and his cross *and the empty tomb* in front of our eyes, no matter what!

Conclusion:

Where's Wally? has been a popular reading book for kids over the years..... Reading the book involves trying to find where Wally is, in the various pictures in the book. The theme for today, the theme "Where's Wally?", is a bit corny, I guess, but I've used it to set the scene for you asking yourself, "Where am I?", with regard to the diagram that I've drawn.

Well, "Where are you?" My prayer is that all of us can answer:

"I'm on God's track, trusting in Jesus as my Saviour, and I want to stay there, and I want my children to stay there and my grandchildren to stay there no matter what!!"

May God bless you as you do that, empowered by His Spirit in you! May God bless you as you run the race of your life, always keeping Jesus, and his cross *and the empty tomb* before your eyes.

Addendum:

Just a few thoughts about sport on Sunday....

We want our children, and our grandchildren to participate in sport and to enjoy their sport....

And yet, much sport for young people is playing on Sunday mornings when worship opportunities are offered to us....

How do we balance the two, without our children and our grandchildren wandering away from Jesus because of this?

Some suggestions:

- * **Give an example to your children and your grandchildren about how much your relationship to God through Jesus means to you: by worshipping regularly, and bringing your young ones to worship as much as possible.**
- * **Make use of CHURCH@HOME when you can't worship with your children**
- * **Spend times reading *The Beginner's Bible* with your children, and chatting with your children and your grandchildren about God, and about Jesus.**
- * **Look for other opportunities to worship with your children. For example, Salisbury has a Friday night worship service, *and maybe we can do a Children's service here on a Friday night once a month or whatever.***