

GET UP AND GO!

These are starting blocks. They help a runner get off to a fast start. The start is critical. A race can be won or lost in the first few seconds. Runners spend a lot of time learning how to start a race. They may spend months training, lifting weights, running, getting their bodies in top physical condition, but if they blow it on the starting blocks, it is all for nought.

Let me say the obvious. You cannot win the race if you don't get started.

Can you imagine a great athlete devoting years getting ready for the Olympics, and then on the day of the race, entering the arena, approaching the starting blocks with the confidence of one who has done this hundreds of times, shaking his feet and arms, making sure he is loose and ready to go, and upon hearing the starter yell out "to your marks," crouching down, carefully placing first his left foot on the starting block and then his right foot, hands on the starting line, eyes on the finish line, and upon hearing the starter bellow out "get set" focusing his attention, tensing every muscle in his body, straining his ears to hear the signal to go, and then when the starter's gun fires, he doesn't move? He just stays there, crouched in his starting blocks, all primed and ready to go, but he doesn't go. Can you imagine such a thing?

You cannot win the race if you don't get started. You cannot win the race if you stay bent over in the starting blocks. To win the race you have to get up and go! You know that, and so do I!

But when it comes to the race of faith, many folks never get out of the starting blocks. They may get ready. They may get set. But they don't go. What a waste!

There are parents who want their children to be baptized and promise to faithfully bring them to the services of God's house and provide for their instruction in the Christian faith, but never do. There are young people who spend years preparing for the rite of confirmation. On the day of confirmation they promise to live among God's faithful people, to hear his Word, share in his supper, and proclaim the good news of God through word and deed, but never follow through.

There are folks who regularly go to church and Bible study. But during the week they become mean-spirited and grumpy and tell lies and curse the name of God. Worse, they don't serve others and they resist sharing their faith. They don't apply the Word of God to their daily lives.

All the preparations are for nought if one doesn't get up and go. All the good intentions in the world are for nought if one doesn't get up and go.

In the Gospel reading for today we heard about a woman who was so bent over that she couldn't get up and go. We are told that this woman had a spirit that had crippled her for eighteen years. She couldn't get up and go. It wasn't a spinal injury or some debilitating disease that kept her bent over. It was a spirit that crippled her.

And so it is for us. A "spirit" often keeps us bent over and unable to get up and go. Isn't that true?

There are times when you may feel like there is such a heavy load on your back that you can't get up. Or you may feel scared. Or you may feel you are stressed out. It is not always easy to get up and go. And

often it is a spirit that cripples you, that renders you unable to function properly, that paralyzes you with anxiety or fear. And like the woman in the story today, that spirit can hang on for a long, long time.

Jesus was teaching in the synagogue when this woman appeared. When Jesus saw her, he called her over and said, "*Woman, you are set free from your ailment.*" Then he laid his hands on her and immediately she stood up straight and began praising God.

Do you need a word from Jesus to set you free from the spirits that are crippling you? Do you need a word from Jesus to empower you stand up and praise God? Do you need a word from Jesus which will help you get up out of the starting blocks and run the race of faith?

Well, Jesus has such a word for you. Are you worried? Jesus says, "I will take care of you." Are you stressed out? Jesus says, "I will give you rest." Are you scared? Jesus says, "I will be with you." Are you feeling inadequate? Jesus says, "I will give you strength."

Jesus has a good word for you. And no word is more powerful than the word of the cross. Jesus didn't just get ready for his ministry to you. Jesus didn't just get set. Jesus got up and did what was necessary to help you. Jesus went to the cross. He suffered and died for you. He came to your rescue in order to save you.

Today, Jesus comes to set you free - not only for all eternity, but for right now. He comes and says to you, "You are set free from your crippling spirit!" He comes today in bread and wine to say to you, "You are set free from your crippling spirit!" Take this word to heart. You are free to get up and go!

So do it! It is now time to stand up and praise God! It is now time to get up out of the starting blocks and GO!