Complete Together
Hebrews 11:29–12:2

One of Zion Church members once told me this story. A couple was sitting in church on Sunday morning. During the sermon, the husband began to nod off. The pastor noticed and whispered to the wife, "Would you wake him up?" Embarrassed, she shook her husband awake… but before long, his head began to droop again. The pastor called out again, "Make sure he stays awake this time." But the wife looked up and said, "Pastor, you're the one putting him to sleep—why are you asking me to wake him up?" We share a laugh over this funny story.

Then, let me ask you: was that pastor a good preacher or a bad one? The answer is… we don't know. Maybe the sermon was boring. Or maybe the husband had no interest in listening.

A friend once told me about his time serving as a military chaplain.
One Sunday, Rev. Sam Hwan Kim—one of the most famous preachers in Korea—came to his church to preach. This is a man whose sermons would pack out auditoriums, whose voice could hold a crowd for an hour without anyone checking their watch.
But military church is… well, a different world. If you're not familiar with Korean military life, here's how it works: for many soldiers, going to church on Sunday isn't always about faith. Sometimes it's about the cookies and juice after the service… or a guaranteed hour where no officer will yell at you. And when the sermon begins? That's prime nap time.

So what happened when one of Korea's greatest preachers came to speak? My friend just shook his head and laughed: "Even Rev. Kim couldn't keep them awake." The truth is, if someone doesn't have the heart to listen, even the greatest preacher in the world might as well be reading a bedtime story.

We often think of a sermon as something the preacher does alone—something the pastor prepares and delivers while everyone else just listens. But preaching is never a solo act. I often say: half of the sermon is the preacher's work, and the other half is the congregation's. If you've ever been blessed by one of my sermons—or another pastor's—don't just think, *"That was a good sermon."* You can also say, *"I'm a good listener."* That's worth celebrating too. And, of course, all of this rests on the work of the Holy Spirit, who brings everything together for good. The point is: from beginning to end, preaching is something the whole church does together. And in fact, all our ministry—and our faith itself—is something **completed together**.

By Faith

Today's passage gives us story after story of people who, "by faith," accomplished great things. By faith, the Israelites crossed the Red Sea on dry land. By faith, they marched around Jericho for seven days and the walls came down. By faith, Rahab was saved. By faith, judges and prophets "conquered kingdoms, administered justice, received promises, shut the mouths of lions, quenched flames, escaped the sword, became strong in weakness, were mighty in battle, and routed foreign armies." These are the heroes of faith.

But heroes aren't only in the Bible. We also see them in our own Methodist history. One of them is **Rosetta Sherwood Hall**, a medical missionary sent to Korea in 1890. She graduated from the Woman's Medical College of Pennsylvania and sailed across the world to serve. One day, a 16-year-old girl came to her with a severe burn—three of her fingers had fused to her palm. Dr. Hall decided the best treatment was a skin graft. She first took skin from the girl's own arm and grafted it to her hand. But the girl, afraid and unfamiliar with modern medicine, refused to allow more skin to be taken.

So what did Dr. Hall do? She took skin from her own arm—three pieces—and grafted them onto the girl's hand. Other missionaries and even the girl's brother also donated their own skin. In total, about 30 pieces of skin were grafted, and the girl was healed.

The great faith and love of one woman planted seeds of the gospel in Korea. One of those seeds grew into me standing here before you today… and into the more than a thousand Korean Methodist pastors serving around the world.

When we hear stories like that, we might feel inspired—but we might also think, *"I could never do something like that."* But here's the truth: even those great acts of faith were never done alone. Dr. Hall's ministry in Korea was only possible because of the Woman's Foreign Missionary Society and the Methodist women's groups who supported her. Faithful church members quietly gave offerings and prayed. Without them, her work would not have been possible. No one walks the journey of faith alone. Faith is something we live out together.

A Relay Across Generations

What grips me most in today's passage is not the stories of great victories—but the stories of those who suffered for their faith. Some were mocked, beaten, imprisoned. Some were stoned, sawn in two, or killed by the sword. Some wandered in deserts, mountains, and caves—destitute, persecuted, mistreated. By the world's standards, they looked like failures.

Yet God calls them just as much "people of faith" as the ones who achieved great victories. And Hebrews 11:39–40 tells us something even more amazing: "They were all commended for their faith, yet none of them received what had been promised. God had planned something better for us so that only together with us would they be made perfect." In other words—our faith completes theirs. The faith of those who suffered is not wasted because we are here today, still running the race. And our faith will one day be completed by those who come after us.

That means the size of our church, or the challenges we face, do not define whether our faith is "complete." Our task is simply this: don't give up. Keep the faith. Pray. Move forward. As Hebrews 12 says: "Since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith."

When I think of that "great cloud of witnesses," I remember my elementary school's sports day. Every fall, our whole school would divide into red and blue teams. We played games, ran races, and shouted ourselves hoarse cheering.

But the highlight of the day was always the relay race. The fastest runners from each grade ran for their team, and the whole school cheered. Even if you weren't running, you felt the excitement. In a relay race, it doesn't matter if you're the fastest runner in the world—if you drop the baton, the team suffers. And it doesn't matter if you're not the strongest—what matters is that you take the baton from the one before you and run your part faithfully, then pass it on. That's the life of faith—a relay race across generations.

Just last Sunday, right before worship, I saw one of our members greet little Elizabeth with a big smile. Then I looked around and noticed the other children in our church—Grace, Sam, Isaiah, Ben, Eva. Our faith is made complete because of these children. And we, in turn, must help their faith grow. This is how we become complete—together.

Beloved Asbury family, we are running a race that Jesus has already finished. We are not running alone. The saints of faith who have gone before us are cheering us on. The people beside us in this congregation are running with us.

So if you've been tired and your head has been down—lift your eyes again. If you've been discouraged—look around. If you've been running alone—reach out for the hands beside you.

Let's keep running the race God has given us. Let's be a church that fulfills our mission with faith and perseverance. And when our race is done, we will hand the baton to the next runners. And the great cloud of witnesses will cheer—not because we ran the fastest, but because we ran faithful to the end. Amen.