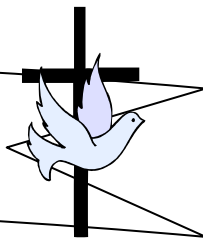


The St. Mark Messenger



Rev. Paul Scheunemann,
Vacancy Pastor

Pat Pritzlaff, Editor

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Don't Drop the Baton

If you are like me, you have been watching some of the competition in the 2024 Olympics from France. I am not real familiar with some of the various events. And others I wonder how they are even an event in the Olympics. I have heard that women's flag football may be a competition or event in the future. As I watch the Olympics I am amazed at the God given skills and abilities of the various athletes. The dedication of the athletes and the commitment and hours and hours of their training and practice is inspiring. I remember the names of some of the USA Olympians from the past and am interested to learn more about this newer generation of participants.

In the 1988 Olympics, the world assumed that the United States would be victorious in the 400-meter relay. They simply were the best. The gun cracked and they were off and running. After the last curve the unthinkable happened. The United States was ahead by 10 meters with no real competition in sight. And then, with victory in their grasp, it happened. They dropped the baton. The thousands in the stands gasped in disbelief. The United States team--sleek, muscular, and fast as leopards, lost the race. Why? Someone dropped the baton.

In several of his letters, the Apostle Paul compares the Christian life to an athletic competition. He encourages the believers to be dedicated and in constant training, always keeping their eyes on the prize of eternal life in Christ Jesus. As members of St. Mark Lutheran Church, we too need to be vigilant in our training. We search for guidance in our training manual, the Holy Scriptures. We need the nourishment and energy provided at the Lord's training table, the Lord's Supper. We do it so that we might fight the good fight of faith. We do it so that we might run with perseverance the race set before us. I would hate for us as a church to be the people who dropped the baton. What is God calling us to be and to do as God's people in this time and this place? Christ has provided all that is necessary for our salvation and the work of His kingdom. It's not a question of resources but a question of faith. As the Epistle reading on July 28, Ephesians 3:20-21, reminded us, "Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen.

Running the race with you,
Pastor Paul