

"On Your Mark, Get Set, Go"

Text: James 1:17-22

^{ESV}(**Colossians 3:16-17**) *Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God. ¹⁷ And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.* Amen.

Dear Fellow Christians, life in this sinful world is treacherous, always shifting and unstable. Nothing temporal is ever completely reliable. God help us if we fail to acknowledge that fact and act accordingly. Since life on earth is so unstable, we need a special place to center ourselves, a sure horizon on which to focus. We need something solid and unchanging, a sure, fixed point of reference and stability. There is but one such place. The hymn writer put it well:

*Swift to its close ebbs out life's little day;
Earth's joys grow dim, its glories pass away;
Change and decay in all around I see.
O Thou who changest not, abide with me!*

That one sure, certain point of reference is now and always will be our unchanging Lord and his perfect Word. Here we can always find certainty in an uncertain world, confidence in a world of apprehension, serenity in the midst of anxiety.

We turn therefore once again this morning to a study of that Word of God, and this morning we find words of truth that can give us not only certainty and comfort, but also the zeal and courage necessary to follow through on those words. The text on which we will base our study this morning is found in the Epistle of James, the First Chapter:

^{ESV}(**James 1:17-22**) *Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change. ¹⁸ Of his own will he brought us forth by the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures. ¹⁹ Know this, my beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger; ²⁰ for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God. ²¹ Therefore put away all filthiness and rampant wickedness and receive with meekness the*

implanted word, which is able to save your souls. ²² But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.

This is God's Word - perfect, holy, certain and unchanging. Ingest these words. Make them your own, for they are indeed the words of Life Eternal. In reverent awe we therefore pray, "**Sanctify us by your truth, O Lord. Your word is truth!**" Amen.

Do any of you remember the Olympic coverage of the 2000 games in Sydney, Australia – specifically the Women's All-Around Gymnastics competition? Interesting lessons learned there. For some reason the greatest female gymnasts in the world were falling all over the mats in the vault competition. No one was sure just why until one of the young women complained to her coach that the vaulting horse seemed "off." They measured, and to everyone's consternation they found that it was set about 2" below regulation. The reason so many gymnasts were faring so poorly was that they had lost their normal point of reference. When they came flying through the air, the horse was not where they expected to find it. It was two inches lower, and it threw everything off. Some of the wrecks were quite spectacular.

We can learn at least two important lessons from that debacle. The first is that a constant, certain point of reference is absolutely vital. The second lesson has to do with carrying on even in the face of failure or hardship. Some of the girls who had done poorly on the vault (before the error was discovered) gave up on later events because they believed themselves to be out of medal contention. When the height error of the vault was discovered and corrected, those who had already vaulted were given the option to do the event over. Those who had continued to do their best, despite the fact that they had considered themselves out of the running, fared well. However the "do-over" did little good for the quitters. Those who had given up on the other events did not fare well.

Which are you? What is your reaction when hardships, disappointments, or setback are allowed to come into your life? Are you more likely to be a quitter or a learner? Your honest answer has direct bearing on the lessons of our text for this morning. Hard times are allowed by our God to teach us, to strengthen us, and to draw us closer. You undoubtedly know from your own personal experience that we tend to drift away during the good times and to walk closer and pray more fervently during the hard times. Through it all we struggle for consistency, for a consistently close walk or relationship with our Lord

Jesus. To do this we need that center or anchor we talked about earlier.

This is where our text comes in, which we will examine on the basis of those three phrases every runner knows well: “*On your mark. Get set. Go.*”

Our text begins: **“Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change. ¹⁸ Of his own will he brought us forth by the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures.”** That’s our “*On your mark*,” our sure point of reference. What a stark contrast here between God and man. The greatest contrast, of course, is the perfect consistency of our God compared to the appalling inconsistency of man. Look at these words again. Directly, or by inference, these words describe God in terms of *always* and *every*. Our God is *always* good, *always* perfect, *always* generous. He is the giver of *every* good gift. Our God is *always* the same and *always* desires our salvation. He is *always* holy, *always* pure.

Try these attributes on yourself or, for that matter, on anything at all other than God and his Word. How do they fit? Are you *always anything* that is good? We certainly fail miserably in the areas of goodness, perfection, and generosity. Pure and holy? Hardly. We have soiled ourselves with the same filth in which the world wallows. We have exposed ourselves to the perversion of what flows from our screens to the point that we no longer wince at it. The gag reflex of what the godless do has been replaced by a yawn.

That’s why the “*On your mark*” of our text relies not on us but on our God. Everything else is shifting and uncertain. God is neither. Our text assures us that the very same God who never changes (“**with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change**”) is the same one who **“of his own will brought us forth by the word of truth.”** Understand well these words and make certain that you grasp their significance. We live in a world where feelings and love seem to come and go on a whim. We live in a world where truth is said to be relative. Nothing at all seems certain, until we look to God and his Word. Ours is the God that does not change. Neither his love for us nor his will for our lives ever changes.

Like a sprinter placing his feet in the precisely located blocks, that’s our “*mark*,” our point of certainty and confidence. It is built on God’s fidelity, God’s consistency, God’s unchanging will. There is no shadow of change possible here – not with a perfect God. The same God who has declared one thing cannot suddenly say another.

This, as we said, is our mark. This is the solid, unchanging anchor where all must begin – with our God and his unchanging Word of truth. What then is the next thing every runner hears? “*Get set.*” Even if you have only just watched a race without ever participating, you know the importance of this second command. Sprinters continue to shift and adjust their feet and hands right up until the moment they hear this second command to “*Get set.*”

Even the godless fiddle and fuss with the Word of God. They use it as the basis for jokes, they pull bits and pieces from it in an attempt to justify their own preconceived notions, they rummage through it to find evidence to disprove or ridicule it. What they absolutely do *not* do is allow that Word of God to “set” their hearts and lives.

By God’s grace, you not only recognize God’s Word as your mark, you are set, for you know Jesus. That means you are absolutely set *for life* – for this and the next. Your solid point of reference (God’s Word) did that for you by creating saving faith in your Savior. You have seen shown that God’s Word is not just about entertainment or moralizing. It points always, universally and with perfect consistency, to Jesus Christ. It points to Jesus not just as example but to Jesus as Savior. Not as the One who showed you what you must do but as the one who did all for you. We all failed miserably to keep God’s law perfectly, so Jesus did that for us. He then credited his perfection to our account; that is, he paid the debt we owed by offering his perfect life on the cross. Our sins there found perfect, complete, unalterable satisfaction. We have been forgiven. We are set.

Every time we go to that holy, unchanging Word of God (our solid foundation, our “mark”) we are reminded that we are “set” both for life on earth and for life eternal through faith in Jesus Christ. Yet what always follows is that which follows in every race: “*Go.*” Who would ever want to watch, let alone compete in, a race where the runners were told to go to their marks and get set, but never told to go? So too with God’s children. We go to his Word, we are set for life through faith in our Savior Jesus, but there we also hear God’s own “*Go!*” – back out into a world of deceit and uncertainty, back out into a world where your faith will be tested and assaulted, back out into a world that needs to see what a Christian looks like.

Everything Christians do in life teaches those around them. So it is that our text, having centered us on our Savior God and his assurance of forgiveness and redemption, provides us necessary guidance as we

“go” back out into the shifting, insecure world in which we must live. Our text tells us: ***“Know this, my beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger; for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God. Therefore put away all filthiness and rampant wickedness and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls. But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.”***

We hear God’s “Go!” in that last sentence, don’t we? ***“Be doers of the word, and not hearers only.”*** Promises that are not kept are nothing more than mindless chatter. Words that are not heard and heeded are just words, of benefit to no one. Our God has called us to a living and active faith, filled with love for our God and for our neighbor. Anything else is like a race where the runners go to their marks, get set, but never go.

Go back for a moment to those 2000 Olympic games. How would you feel if you were one of those athletes that gave up because you failed on the maladjusted vault? It undoubtedly haunts those who did so. This is anything but an arbitrary question for each of us today – here and now. Every single one of us has failed. We could argue that it wasn’t our fault or that life isn’t fair. We could dwell on the past and allow our past failures, our sins, to demoralize and defeat us. Or we could return to the unchanging center of our Christian faith: Jesus Christ, who paid in full for every single one of our failures on the cross of Calvary. Since we cannot now go back and undo the failures of the past, dwelling on our failures is worse than pointless. Not only can we never fix or make up for what is past, our God never calls on us to try. Jesus has already fixed that problem. What our God *does* want to see in us are children who move forward from that solid center of Christ crucified to lives of humble service and thanksgiving.

Do not refuse the urging of that Holy Spirit as he speaks to you in your heart. Doing that right thing that you have heard from God’s Word will not pay for your sins, but what an appropriate way to say thank you to the Savior who has rescued you from eternal death in hell. We have our God-appointed starting point. We are already set for life eternal through faith in Jesus Christ. Now go – be an actual doer of the Word. Serve the Lord with gladness. Amen.

ESV(Numbers 23:11-20) And Balak said to Balaam, "What have you done to me? I took you to curse my enemies, and behold, you have done nothing but bless them." ¹² And he answered and said, "Must I not take care to speak what the LORD puts in my mouth?" ¹³ And Balak said to him, "Please come with me to another place, from which you may see them. You shall see only a fraction of them and shall not see them all. Then curse them for me from there." ¹⁴ And he took him to the field of Zophim, to the top of Pisgah, and built seven altars and offered a bull and a ram on each altar. ¹⁵ Balaam said to Balak, "Stand here beside your burnt offering, while I meet the LORD over there." ¹⁶ And the LORD met Balaam and put a word in his mouth and said, "Return to Balak, and thus shall you speak." ¹⁷ And he came to him, and behold, he was standing beside his burnt offering, and the princes of Moab with him. And Balak said to him, "What has the LORD spoken?" ¹⁸ And Balaam took up his discourse and said, "Rise, Balak, and hear; give ear to me, O son of Zippor: ¹⁹ God is not man, that he should lie, or a son of man, that he should change his mind. Has he said, and will he not do it? Or has he spoken, and will he not fulfill it? ²⁰ Behold, I received a command to bless: he has blessed, and I cannot revoke it.

ESV(Hebrews 13:1-9) Let brotherly love continue. ² Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares. ³ Remember those who are in prison, as though in prison with them, and those who are mistreated, since you also are in the body. ⁴ Let marriage be held in honor among all, and let the marriage bed be undefiled, for God will judge the sexually immoral and adulterous. ⁵ Keep your life free from love of money, and be content with what you have, for he has said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you." ⁶ So we can confidently say, "The Lord is my helper; I will not fear; what can man do to me?" ⁷ Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the word of God. Consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith. ⁸ Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever. ⁹ Do not be led away by diverse and strange teachings, for it is good for the heart to be strengthened by grace, not by foods, which have not benefited those devoted to them.

ESV(James 1:17-22) Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change. ¹⁸ Of his own will he brought us forth by the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures. ¹⁹ Know this, my beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger; ²⁰ for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God. ²¹ Therefore put away all filthiness and rampant wickedness and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls. ²² But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.



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and every perfect gift
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James 1:17 ESV

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The 20th Sunday after Pentecost – October 6, 2024

The Opening Prayer by the Pastor

The Opening Hymn – 3 (Red Hymnal)

"Lord Jesus Christ, Be Present Now"

The Order of Service – Supplement page 12ff. (Brown Hymnal)

The Scripture Lessons: (Printed on the back page of this bulletin)

The Old Testament Lesson: (Numbers 23:11-20) Our Old Testament Lesson tells the fascinating account of when the panic-stricken Balak, King of Moab, in desperation hired the Prophet Balaam to curse God's people as they prepared to enter the Promised Land. While there are several interesting aspects to this account, including God allowing Balaam's donkey to speak, we focus this morning on one in particular: the changelessness of our God and his absolute truthfulness. Unlike man, our God is always perfectly consistent.

Psalm 96 (Supplement page 26) (Brown Hymnal) (Read Responsively)

The Gospel Lesson: (Hebrews 13:1-9) Our second reading expands on the truth that we have an unchanging God who can, in all ways, be trusted. There is both comfort and warning in this truth. The God who loves his children will never stop loving his children. Yet it is also true that the God who condemned sin will never suddenly change his attitude toward sin. God's view of evil is never altered by society's immorality.

The Confession of Faith -

The Apostolic Creed – page 15. (Brown Hymnal)

The Pre-Sermon Hymn – 238 (Stanzas 1-5) (Red Hymnal)

"All Glory Be to God Alone"

The Sermon – Text: James 1:17-22 (Printed on the back page)

"On Your Mark, Get Set, Go"

The Offertory – (Supplement page 16 insert)

The Post-Sermon Hymn – 521 (Stanzas 1-4) (Red Hymnal)

"What God Ordains Is Always Good"

The Prayers

The Benediction

The Closing Hymn – 552 (Stanzas 1-2) (Red Hymnal)

"Abide with Me! Fast Falls the Eventide"

Silent Prayer

Welcome! - We warmly welcome any visitors who might be with us this morning and invite you to join us every Sunday at this time. St. Paul is a congregation in fellowship with the Church of the Lutheran Confession (CLC) – a conservative Lutheran synod with churches and missions throughout the United States and around the world. We are glad you are here. Thank you for letting us share the Word of God with you. Please record your visit in our Guest Book, and come again.

Attendance – Sunday (38) Average (32)

This Week at St. Paul:

Today	-9:00 a.m.	– Sunday school and Bible Class
	-10:00 a.m.	– Worship Service
	-11:00 a.m.	– Fellowship Hour
Wednesday	-6:00 p.m.	– Confirmation Class
	-7:00 p.m.	– Midweek Bible Study
Next Sunday	-9:00 a.m.	– Sunday school and Bible Class
	-10:00 a.m.	– Worship Service w/Holy Communion
	-11:15 a.m.	– Fellowship Hour

CLC News – Pastor Matthew Hanel has returned the call to St. Stephen of San Francisco. Pastor Frank Gantt is considering the call to Faith of Manchester, MO. Electronic copies of the Proceedings of this summer's CLC Convention are now available. See Pastor Roehl for information on how to download a copy for yourself.

Church Building Project Video – If you missed the viewing of the video of the 2003 building project last Sunday, or if you would like to watch it again, copies are available online. See Pastor Roehl.

Recorded Service Music – In the absence of our organist this morning we will be using music previously recorded – which means there may be some longer than normal (and unavoidable) pauses.

Allison Loeb Baby Shower – A baby shower is planned for Allison Loeb on Sunday, November 3rd at 1:00 pm. Please see the announcement on the bulletin board for more information.

Christmas Flower Order – There is a sign-up sheet on the mailbox table for our annual Christmas flower order. Please address any questions to Sandy Roehl.