

Midweek Lenten Service
April 13, 2011
Hebrews 12:1-2

Our electronic devices like cell phones, iPhones, Blackberries, etc., enable us to stay connected while on the move. That's why they're called "mobile communication." This enables some wonderful things to happen, but one downside is that while we're on the move checking email, sending a text message, or punching in a number, our eyes are down here (on the device) instead of up here (the way ahead). And that can cause problems. Just sit down sometime in a public place and watch people walk by – it's pretty interesting. A good many of those walking by will be focused on their electronic devices and not on where they're headed. What happens can be sometimes very funny, and sometimes not so funny. One of the more funny incidents is the woman on YouTube who was walking around a mall while texting (http://www.youtube.com/results?search_query=lady+falls+in+fountain+while+texting&aq=0). Because she wasn't focused on where she was walking, she fell over the enclosure surrounding the fountain and landed face-down in the water, emerging very wet and undoubtedly very embarrassed. I think we can identify with that woman. We've all got stories of when we weren't paying attention to where we were going and ended up in a place where we didn't want to be. This is kind of a picture of what happens when we take our eyes off Jesus. The writer to the Hebrews encourages us: **"Let us keep our eyes fixed on Jesus..."** (Hebrews 12:1).

Tonight is the final midweek Lenten service as we've focused on the theme "By Faith." Week by week, we've looked at various people of faith from Hebrews 11: Noah, Abraham, Moses, the people of Israel. They, like we, walked by faith in their own lives. But unlike them, we possess one thing they did not, and that is Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith. Their faith anticipated the promised coming of the Son of God, but they did not behold him with their eyes. They saw him from a distance; from afar. They were looking ahead to what was yet to be. Our faith rejoices in the coming of Jesus, who as we confess in the Creed, "was born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried. On the third day he rose again, and ascended into heaven." We rejoice in all that Jesus has done for us – his humble birth; his life and ministry of bringing good news to the people; his innocent suffering and death upon the cross; his glorious resurrection from the dead. But we weren't there to see all of this with our own eyes. We have the witness of Scripture and the testimony of those before us whose faith was in the crucified and risen Savior. We walk by faith.

But the call to keep our eyes fixed on Jesus is not just a looking back at his earthly life and ministry some 2000 years ago. By faith, we walk through this life keeping our eyes fixed on Jesus as we anticipate his coming again. And that is what I'd like to focus our attention on this evening. What sort of lives ought we to be living as we keep our eyes fixed on Jesus, anticipating his coming again? How, then, should we live? If God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son that whosoever believes in him should not perish, but have eternal life, what does that mean for us here tonight?

This past week, I was in Colorado at the annual conference of the Pastoral Leadership Institute. This was my fourth and final conference, and it was an incredibly uplifting experience. As one presenter pointed out to us, in keeping our eyes fixed on Jesus, we cannot lose sight of those who are around us on our journey of faith. And, as he pointed out, the only thing we can take to heaven with us are other people. All

the stuff of life – money, material goods, possessions – it all stays here. As the old saying goes, you don't see too many U-hauls following a hearse. So, in keeping our eyes fixed on Jesus we also have the joyful duty of making Jesus real in the lives of other people. How do we do this? By loving other people as Jesus has loved us – it's as simple as that; it's as difficult as that. Keeping our eyes fixed on Jesus means that we walk by faith. It means that we do not have all the answers; we don't have everything figured out. But it does mean that we trust Jesus to be with us in the midst of not having everything figured out. It means that by faith we're willing to follow Jesus where he's leading us, even if it's outside our comfort zone. It means that by faith we're willing to let go of things that pull us away from Jesus.

150 years ago yesterday was a momentous day in the life our nation. On April 12, 1861, the Civil War began with the Confederate attack on Ft. Sumter, South Carolina, and our nation became a house divided, pitting North against South, neighbor against neighbor, family against family. The Civil War “pioneered an industrial style of “total war,” which included mass production of weapons and the systematic destruction Southern agriculture; it killed about 620,000 combatants – nearly as many Americans as all the other wars the country has fought combined” (*USA Today, April 8, 2011, p. 8A*). But what about the war which Jesus fought – the war against evil, death, and hell? How do we measure the cost of this? That is what the cross reminds us of – the wonderful and terrible cost of our salvation, paid for in blood by the Son of God. And so let us keep our eyes on Jesus, **“the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God”** (Hebrews 12:2). Amen.