



## SUNDAY SERMON

# We're In This Together

---

Did you know that “problem solving deficit disorder” is “a thing” these days? It’s a predictable by-product of reliance on technology: problem solving deficit disorder. NPR did a report a few months ago. It began with a mom overhearing her child doing homework asking Alexa, Amazon’s smart speaker, “Alexa, what’s five minus three?”

Some educators think such help is fine because it allows the child to advance rapidly to more complex challenges. If you’re not good at spelling or want to know the name of a state capital, why not ask Alexa or Google? Other educators and behavioral scientists contend that for healthy development we each need basic, essential problem-solving skills. Getting stumped by a problem and working for the answer helps us develop perseverance, patience, and resourcefulness.

The author of the Letter to the Hebrews tells of those who, by faith, were able to accomplish remarkable feats and, in so doing, to live in right relationship with God. Building upon a long, colorful list of those who have gone before us – the martyrs, the faithful, both well-known and little-known – concludes with words of encouragement:

Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, who for the sake of the joy that was set before him endured the cross, disregarding its shame, and has taken his seat at the right hand of the throne of God.

I am wondering what you need for the race that is set before us, the race you’re running in this present hour, and the race that may lie ahead for you, for each of us. The author of the Letter to the Hebrews affirms our life as gift from God and proclaims that Jesus is the Way, that Jesus has provided the Way for us to live. The author also knows that the Way is not always easy, perhaps not ever easy. Burdened as we are and the need we have to lay aside the weight of the things we carry, the sin that clings so close, perseverance itself can feel like a tall order.

Sarah and I have yet to welcome Alexa into our house. Not for any philosophical reasons and certainly not because of any moral principles; we just haven’t... yet. But I’m wondering what Alexa and Jesus have in common. On the one hand, they’re both right here with us, silent most of the time; even unnoticed. But right here, none-the-less, ever-present, taking it all in, available, ready. Both are also all-knowing. But the similarities may end there.

*continued*

### DATE

Pentecost 10  
Sunday, August 18, 2019

### PREACHER

The Rev. Ledlie Laughlin

Hebrews 11:29-12:2

**St. Columba's**  
EPISCOPAL CHURCH

---

St. Columba's is a welcoming Christian community that seeks to be open in spirit, deep in faith, rich in worship, active in service.

4201 Albemarle Street NW ■ Washington, DC 20016 ■ 202-363-4119 ■ Columba.org

I don't often find Jesus to be quick with easy answers to the questions I ask. Truth be told, I'm a little wary of the folks who claim that Jesus gives them every answer in a neat little bundle. Jesus is the Way for me but when it comes to faith I'm at no risk of suffering from a problem solving deficit disorder. It's the problem-solving that deepens my faith, leads me toward truth.

Traveling with Jesus – by which I mean trying to live with some modicum of integrity, intention, and grace; with generosity and open heart, with my life bent toward justice and compassion – I find such a path calls me to dig deep: to pray and reflect and act and give and serve. And, that's day one. So, then to get up and live that path again the next day, and the next. And it's not easy. But it's rich, full, and life-giving; it's the whole shebang. Jesus doesn't solve life's problems; Jesus invites us to engage life's problems with a commitment to love and a passion for justice. The author of Hebrews says Jesus is the pioneer and the perfecter of our faith; Jesus is doing the saving here, not you or me. But Jesus says, "come, follow me" – not just the first time, but time and again, because we go off course and try to make it alone; come, follow me.

For me, the essential ingredient for persevering and running the race is that great cloud of witnesses – the folks who have gone before, yes; and the folks who are on the Way with us. More than anything else, we need one another. The race isn't over until we get every one across the finish line.

With summer comes the Tour de France. I've been thinking about what I'll call "lessons from the peloton" – peloton; from the French, meaning platoon. The peloton is the pack of bicyclists you see moving like a school of fish as they climb the alps or wind through fields of lavender. The peloton exists by practical necessity. Riding in a big group reduces drag and saves energy for the people in the middle. New studies show that peloton riders are exposed to 95% less drag than they would experience riding alone - which explains the sensation all riders describe of being sucked along by the bunch while barely having to pedal.

I've never raced but I used to cycle a lot, often riding in small pelotons. That sensation of being pulled along by others is exhilarating. In smaller, recreational pelotons, the riders continually rotate position. Each takes a turn in the lead, working extra hard, taking the brunt of the wind, literally pulling those behind. "Good pull!" a fellow rider might say with appreciation. The lead then drops back to the rear to recover, then circles his or her way back up through the line.

Riding close in this way, the group can maintain a steady, much faster speed than would be possible for anyone riding alone. To be effective, you have to stay close, which means quick communication is vital. Those behind or in the middle of the pack cannot see the way ahead so must watch the rider immediately in front, with your wheels just inches apart. With a quick flick of the wrist, the rider ahead signals to move right or left to avoid a stick, a pothole. When you get out front and suddenly see the open road, there's a natural inclination to leap ahead – which you cannot do because it drains your own energy, diminishes the and messes up the closeness for others.

In a big race like the Tour de France there might be more than twenty teams of six or more riders, each team vying for victory. But even while in fierce competition with one another, everyone relies upon one another and all adhere to a common code to ensure the safety of each.

Who has cleared the path for you, the great cloud of witnesses in whose company you rejoice and upon whom you rely? In the coming week, as you persevere to run the race set before us, how might you take the lead so another can rest? What help can you give to keep another safe? How might you need to drop back, settle into the pack, and let yourself be carried along by the love of God and those about you? We're in this together.