

*During this crucial time in our history with the pandemic of the coronavirus, we are in the midst of some deep waters. None of us knows what any given day will bring forth in terms of more businesses closing, churches closing, schools going online, nails and spas closing and the list continues. We might not know what the future will hold, but we do know who holds this future. This is what we do know, we are on a journey. This season will not last forever, but our faith will continue on past this COVID-19. Our journey is with the Lord and we must be determined to journey by faith.*

*This is what we do know, we are on a journey. This season Webster defines journey as an act of traveling from one place to another. Faith means belief, trust and loyalty to one thing. According to Hebrews 11:1, faith is the substance of things hoped for and the evidence of things not seen. A faith journey would mean traveling from one place with God to another totally depending and trusting in where God is leading us. As Christians, God invites us to walk by faith and not by sight 2 Corinthians 5:7. What does the journey look like when we walk by faith? The journey consists of celebrations, moments of appreciation and thanksgiving to God for the many blessings our heavenly Father bestows upon us. Walking with God might also include moments of disappointment,*

*frustration, grief, tears and pruning. Yet, no matter what the season God's presence remains with us as we learn to dig deeper and become more engaged with Him and his word.*

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*Last Sunday, Greg Hendricks our musician at South Mundy who plays the guitar decided to take a walk of faith. Sunday morning, he showed up at the church to play his music outside of the closed doors. Sunday morning while cars were passing by and Greg played people honked their horns. He was determined to journey by faith with his Lord. His act of faith is the reason we will be worshipping outside this Sunday in our parking lot, in your cars. We are determined to walk this journey by faith no matter what comes our way.*

*Speaking of walking, most recently I got an email from the Crim office to once again walk the race in August, downtown Flint. What caused me to pause in this moment of crisis was the element of hope. Hopefully, in August the Coronavirus will be history and we will move past this season. While this moment has caused us to pause from our daily schedules and ask the question, God what are you trying to say to*

*us. Are you asking us to according to Psalm 46:10 "Be still and know that you are God?" Are you inviting us to slow down to a savoring pace as Kirk Byron Jones wrote in his book, Addicted to Hurry? The world has been married to hurry and hurry is of the devil. Are you saying to us that no matter what happens to us, you are still Awesome? Are you saying to us, "When I shut up the heavens so there is no rain, or command locust to devour the land or send a plague among my people, if my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and I will forgive their sin and heal their land.?"(2 Chronicles 7:13-14) What God might be saying to us, be determined to continue to journey by faith and run this Christian race in the midst of this difficult moment. If we think about our faith being a race, we got to stick with it until the end.*

*The Crim represents one physical race, but many more competitions occur throughout the city, state and world. Millions and millions of people get involved in physical exercise, while billions of people are on their spiritual journey with Jesus Christ. Physical and spiritual walking can be at a slow or fast pace. Scripturally, the race is not given to the swiftest but to those who endure to the end. In the book*

*of Ecclesiastes 9:11 says, “again I saw that under the sun the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, nor bread to the wise, nor riches to the intelligent, nor favor to those with knowledge, but time and chance happen to them all.” Racers while some do it for competition, many people run to just complete the race. Spiritually, the race is not a sprint, but a marathon. We hope that this pandemic for us is a sprint, but it might be a marathon before it ends. Our journey with faith takes time, persistence, endurance, patience and total trust in wherever God leads to experience. In the midst of this trying times, our faith has to be in Jesus Christ who helps us to fight the good fight. Paul wrote in 2 Timothy 4:7, I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.*

*Both physically and spiritually, the walk can cause us to sweat figuratively speaking. Spiritual sweat might look different, for the journey can cause tears to run down our eyes or to cause our spirit and soul to cry out for help. Our journey can be taxing, strenuous, heart wrenching, and trying. Jesus relates to us in his faith journey while in the Garden of Gethsemane according to Luke 22:44, “And being in anguish, he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground”. In the midst of horrific days what we can do on our spiritual walk includes reading the word, studying, praying and*

*trusting in the Word. Hopefully, you are taking this precious gift called time to practices these spiritual disciplines. Journaling, listening and serving can inspire and encourage us along the way. Both physical and spiritual walking for the benefit of being physical healthy and spiritually mature requires sacrifice.*

*Determination and persistence keep us moving forward when we desire to give up. David reminds us in the Psalms 121:1-4, "I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help. My help cometh from the LORD, which made heaven and earth. He will not suffer thy foot to be moved: he that keep thee will not slumber. Behold, he that keep Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep".*

*Over the centuries many instances are notated within the Word of God of persons who journeyed by faith, Moses first heard God's voice in the burning bush. There the angel of the LORD appeared to him in flames of fire from within a bush. Moses saw that though the bush was on fire it did not burn up, Exodus 3;2-4. He began his faith walk in the ministry at this point in his life. Jacob in his sinful life encountered the angel on his way back home. In Genesis 32:24-32 <sup>4</sup> Jacob was left alone; and a man wrestled with him until daybreak.<sup>25</sup> When the man saw that*

he did not prevail against Jacob, he struck him on the hip socket; and Jacob's hip was put out of joint as he wrestled with him. <sup>26</sup> Then he said, "Let me go, for the day is breaking." But Jacob said, "I will not let you go, unless you bless me." <sup>27</sup> So he said to him, "What is your name?" And he said, "Jacob." <sup>28</sup> Then the man<sup>[a]</sup> said, "You shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel,<sup>[b]</sup> for you have striven with God and with humans,<sup>[c]</sup> and have prevailed." <sup>29</sup> Then Jacob asked him, "Please tell me your name." But he said, "Why is it that you ask my name?" And there he blessed him. <sup>30</sup> So Jacob called the place Peniel,<sup>[d]</sup> saying, "For I have seen God face to face, and yet my life is preserved." In times like these, God's presence can surround and transform us into a new person because we choose to walk the faith journey with God. Jacob began a different walk with the Lord after wrestling with the Lord.

In the book of Ruth, Ruth the daughter in law to Naomi, was a woman who desired to journey the path less traveled for a Moabite woman. Her witness of Naomi's life might have been the drawing card for her to leave behind her family and friends to experience a closer walk with God. Yet, Naomi entered into the dark night of the soul as she had lost her family to war, her husband and two sons. Her joy changed into sorrow. Now words like grieved, disappointed, devastated,

*frustrated and sad described the state Naomi felt at this moment. But, bitterness seemed to be a word most prominent in her life. Her husband led them to the nation of the Moabites to escape the famine from their own country Israel. In the midst of the times which famine invaded their country; Elimelech left to live in a place God considered his wash pot. A wash pot in this incidence meant a humiliated nation washing the feet of conquering soldiers. The Moabite women seduced the Jewish men into immorality and idolatry resulting in over 25,000 people dying. Jewish men were forbidden to marry Moabite women. Yet, Mahlon and Chilon the children of Elimelech and Naomi married Moabite women against the will of God.*

*Now, Naomi had lost her whole family to death, she decided to return to her own country. Initially, both of her daughter in laws asked to return with her to Judah, but only one walked the journey with Naomi. In this moment, Naomi struggles in her faith journey because she is leaving without any support systems or with any financial backing. Despite, Naomi's persistent plea for the two young ladies to stay, Ruth remained steadfast in the new faith she desired to establish.*

*<sup>15</sup> "Look," said Naomi, "your sister-in-law is going back to her people and her gods. Go back with her."<sup>16</sup> But Ruth replied, "Don't urge me to leave*

*you or to turn back from you. Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God. <sup>17</sup> Where you die, I will die, and there I will be buried. May the LORD deal with me, be it ever so severely, if even death separates you and me.” <sup>18</sup> When Naomi realized that Ruth was determined to go with her, she stopped urging her. <sup>19</sup> So the two women went on until they came to Bethlehem. Just like Ruth was determined to go with Naomi, we too must be determined to walk with God.*

*Surely, Ruth possibly could have strengthened Naomi’s faith at this moment. Ruth assisted Naomi in household duties and she gleaned the fields of her relative Boaz. Later Boaz notices Ruth and soon she lays down on the threshing floor. Her offering herself at the threshing informed him that she was available for marriage. Her obedience brought forth blessings. Out of obedience to God can bring forth blessings. Ruth instructed her about how to approach Boaz. Later, Boaz married her mainly because of her commitment to her mother-in law and her new faith in God. Even though she entered the country as a Moabite, she trusted in the God of Naomi who then blessed her immensely due to her strong and determined faith. Repentance, confession, conversion, transformation and celebration all became a part of Ruth’s determine*

*journey with the Lord. As a result of her determination and faithfulness, Ruth becomes a part of the lineage of Jesus.*

*Determination in our walk happens when we keep getting up again despite the setbacks and difficulties along the journey. Walter Payton, who was five feet ten inches and 202 pounds, was not particularly large running back for the National Football League and the Chicago bears. But he set one of sport's greatest records; the all-time rushing record of 16,726 yards. During his twelve-year career, Payton carried the football over nine miles.*

*What is truly impressive, though, is that on average, he was knocked on the ground every 4.4 yards of those nine miles by someone bigger than himself. He kept getting up, and he kept getting up, and he kept getting up.*

*Great victories await those with great endurance. Surely Ruth and Naomi endured much as they journey back to Judah and Ruth in the fields for a number of years gleaning grain just to eat their next meal. Persistence and patience must be a part of our lifestyle because our walk of faith comes with great determination to finish our course with God. In this season, we must be patient as we are waiting on this virus to*

*dissipate and it will. So be encouraged, remain on determined to journey by faith, walking with God each day and trusting He will never leave or forsake you.*

*God Bless You*