**Tuesday 14th July -** Mike Orman, Worship Pastor

Hebrews 12:1-3

Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us,fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.Consider him who endured such opposition from sinners, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.

It's around this time of year, as the school summer term winds down, that children would normally be taking part in sports days. Sports days hold mixed memories and emotions for many people! Some loved competing against their peers for title of 'Sack Race Champion of the Year'! While for many parents, just the thought of taking part in a mums or dads race was enough in itself to pull a muscle! And we've all seen the younger children running down the track as fast as they can, Criss crossing the lanes as they try to spot their cheering parents in the crowd.
And that can very much be the case for us - distracted by the things around us, causing us to switch lanes and lose our focus. Whatever those distractions look like for you - maybe it's worry and anxiety, busyness, social media and TV addiction, work or even relationships - let's choose to re-calibrate our focus - 'fixing our eyes firmly on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith.' And just as in sports day you can't run a race well whilst in a sack, 'let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles', so that we can run freely and effectively the race He has called us to run. And whilst running let's listen out for the roar of encouragement from the crowd - the great cloud of witnesses cheering us on.

I'm reminded also of the British athlete Derek Redmond, running in the 400m Olympic semi-final, only to pull up part way round after injuring a muscle. You can watch what happened here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dYQ2IyMuPes>

Derek is distraught as he realises his dream of Olympic triumph is over. As all the other athletes complete the race, Derek is still only half way round the track but the crowd begin to get behind him and cheer louder than they did for the winner of the race! And out of the crowd comes Derek's father, who lifts him under his arm and helps him to complete his race. It's an iconic moment in Olympic history but it's such a great image of how our Heavenly Father puts His arm around us, with all of heaven cheering us on, and helps us complete the race. Maybe you're feeling like Derek Redmond today - worn out, carrying injuries and feeling spent. Hang in there - there's a Heavenly Father longing to put His arm around you and carry you over the finish line - you just need to ask Him.

*Jesus, we thank you that you have already run and won this race we are in. Thank you that you never grow weary. For those of us who are feeling weary and for those of us who have taken our eyes off of you, we choose now to fix our eyes on you and run with perseverance the race marked out for us. We thank you that we don't run this race alone and that you are there with your arm around us carrying us over the finish line. Amen.*