The Journey Begins

 Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen. Where does a journey begin? A couple of weeks ago the NFL draft took place. Now during the course of the draft 256 players were selected over the course of 7 rounds. There are players taken from all levels of football, division 1 all the way down. Now do you have any idea what the odds are to make it into the NFL? I know that you know they are astronomical but first do you know how many college football players there are? Each division 1 team like Michigan or Michigan State has 85 scholarship players. There are 129 teams at that level meaning that there are nearly 11,000 division 1 scholarship football players competing for 256 spots. That means that over 97% of players at that level won’t even have a chance. The reason I bring up the draft is because every year the draft centers around a core of players that everyone is projecting to be the cream of the crop. Yet it seems that each of them has a unique story. A story that makes it seem as though they are defying the odds by being able to play professional football, and statistically speaking, they are defying the odds no matter what their story is. The one word that is constantly used when describing this story is journey and certainly we can relate to that. What is the story that has brought you to the place where you are in your life right now? Certainly, in our lives we have been through events, trips, or simply even days that have felt like journeys. In fact, that metaphor fits better than most because after all, life is a journey.

 Life is a journey indeed. It’s not just sports in which we find people with unique journeys. For centuries people have been telling stories of great adventure and journeys that spark our imaginations. However, it always seems at the beginning of those stories there is an initial trial, an initial test, a method of training for the main character. This helps the character to prepare for his journey, for his quest. It also develops them as a character. We begin to connect with them on a more personal level as we start to see them as a regular person. So what trials have you gone through? What tests have you faced? What are the methods of training that have been used in your life? It is amazing the twists and turns our journeys take us on. I’m certain that there are aspects of your life that you certainly could not have predicted. For example, have you ever done something and then thought, “the me of 10 years ago wouldn’t have done that”. But that’s because over the course of time we change as people. The trials that we go through, the methods of training that we are unwillingly subject to at times, they all change us. The old saying goes that iron sharpens iron, meaning that through the fires of tribulation, we become tough, we become formidable. Now you might think that the problem that our society faces is that we aren’t formidable enough. In fact, I hear it about my generation all the time. “Kids just aren’t tough enough these days. They’ve got it so easy compared to when we were growing up. They just don’t appreciate the simpler things in life.” I read stories about how people can’t hold themselves together when they are given news they don’t want to hear. I hear about how people just can’t handle it, and at this point “it” could mean just about anything. So what is it that has made us so soft, for lack of a better term? Well frankly I don’t think the issue lies with toughness. You see a few moments ago, when we started talking about adventure stories I mentioned that the first thing that typically happens is that there is an initial trial. However, that’s not necessarily true. You see no journey can simply begin without knowing its end goal. I think this is the major issue that we face in our day and age. We are a people aimlessly wandering, full of apathy, without a feeling of purpose.

It’s not because we do not have a purpose, but rather because we have lost sight of what our purpose is. Today we celebrate Pentecost, the day in which the Holy Spirit descended upon the apostles. It is a day that presents us with one of the neatest images in all of literature, the valley of the dry bones. Just imagine this scene, a valley, barren, hot, with mountains off far in the distance, and on the ground, as far as the eye can see, simply bones. These are bones that have no purpose. These are bones that are just lying there. These are bones that are dead, with no hope. At times I’m sure we see ourselves in these bones. We see ourselves unable to bear anymore of the burdens that we have. We see ourselves downtrodden, down to our last hope, our wits end. And certainly, at times we are like these bones. We are dead in that our sin brings us forth as those that live in opposition to God. Its at this moment, when we are at our lowest, when we are at our most vulnerable, that the end goal becomes apparent to us, for living a life in such a manner is a life of misery and chaos. One simply need to look at the world to know that this is true.

Yet this life of misery and chaos is not our destiny, just as it was not the destiny of those bones to simply lie upon the ground. You see the world has lost sight of its end goal and thus sin and chaos thrive. It seems as though the farther down the rabbit hole the rest of the world goes, the church is doomed to be dragged with it. And certainly, to some extent the church has lost sight of its goal. In some cases, the church has better aligned itself to the world in order to appease the world. Yet today my friends our journey to right the ship begins. Today we receive the news that we have been given that which is necessary to overcome the world. As I stated earlier today is Pentecost. It has long been the tradition of the church to use Pentecost as a day of recognition for those who have completed instruction in the doctrine of the church, and today we continue that tradition here as we bring three newcomers, Wyatt, Hannah, and Jack, onto this crazy journey with us. Are you guys ready? Do you feel ready? Do you feel you’ve been given all the tools you need to survive? Today our Lord promises to send the helper into our lives in order that he will bear witness to the truth, that truth being Jesus. Now that the three of you are to be confirmed, these tools have all been passed to you. It has also been the tradition of the church to pass on a confirmation verse, a verse which you should take to heart and lean upon when times are tough or when you’re simply struggling through something. Wyatt, the confirmation verse you chose is Romans 6:23 which states, “**For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.**” A fantastic passage truly. For here God’s helper provides us with the truth, the truth that we are sinners, and for our sin we deserve death. Yet the other side of that truth is the eternal life we receive through Christ Jesus. It is thanks to this free gift that our Lord Jesus tells us your verse Jack, from Matthew 11:28, “**Jesus said, ‘Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.’**” Without the free gift of God, there would be no way for us to find rest. We instead would be stuck in a manner of uncertainty, lacking hope. But our God sends us the helper. Now I promise you, there will be times of trial. There will be times where you’ll throw your hands in the air and wonder where it all went wrong. But it’s in times like these where we should remember the helper the most. We should remember the Spirit the most because Hannah your verse, Joshua 1:9 states, “**Be strong and courageous. Do not be frightened, and do not be dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go.**” That is not only true for these upcoming days, but for all the days of your life. Your God is always there for you to lean upon. Your God is always there as a refuge. What’s more is that our God will never run from you. He will always be there for you. Even in the times when you feel the most uncertainty, when you feel the most scared, know that the Spirit is with you. God’s truth is within you. You are a baptized child of God, a child of God who will soon partake of his wonderful feast. You are a baptized child of God, and that makes you special. That gives you purpose. You are a baptized and forgiven child of God, and may the Spirit keep you in this truth now and forever. Amen. Now may the peace of God which surpasses our understanding keep and guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus now and forever. Amen.