

Sunday, July 21, 2024

Scripture Reading: Ephesians 2:11-22

*We must learn to live together as brothers or perish together as fools.
—Martin Luther King Jr.*

On Friday, Paris will host the opening ceremonies for the 2024 Olympic Summer Games. The Olympiad runs from July 26 to August 11. More than 200 countries will send selected athletes to Paris to compete under their national banner. The whole world prays that these young people will be able to compete in peace, and that those with a political agenda will stay away and let the nations of the world have some fun playing together.

With a few notable exceptions, this is exactly what has happened in the past. The eyes of the world will be on Paris for a fortnight, and will rejoice with awe and respect as the winners prevail with grace and the losers accept their losses with good form.

The five-colored rings of the Olympic flag represent the five inhabited continents of the world: Africa, the Americas, Asia, Europe and Oceania. When Pierre de Coubertin created the Rings in 1913, he chose colors that, combined with the white background, represented the colors of the flags of all nations at that point in time.

So for the next two weeks, we will witness the convergence of people from the ends of the world arriving in peace and leaving in harmony. It doesn't happen too often. But once every two years, if we include the Winter Olympics, it *does* happen.

I like to think the *Olympics are an image of the church*. The church worldwide consists of people of all races and traditions. Jesus Christ, after all, is the One who “is our peace” and who has made all “groups into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us” (Ephesians 2:14). According to Paul, we “are no longer strangers and aliens, but [we] are citizens with the saints and also members of the household of God” (v. 19).

This is the church: a “whole structure” that is “joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord; in whom you also are built together spiritually into a dwelling place for God” (vv. 21-22). It is difficult to observe the church sometimes at war with itself. Since we are but human and since certain weaknesses, defects and illnesses exist silently within our spiritual DNA, even the church is vulnerable to occasional outbursts of unsportsmanlike behavior. Paul urges us, however, “If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all” (Romans 12:18).

Good advice indeed! Perhaps we can remember this as we watch the athletes over the next two weeks.

—Timothy Merrill

Prayer: Gracious God, may I be a person of peace this week, and seek to mediate peace among others. Amen.

*Blessings,
Lead & Pastor Ben Holtz*

Daily Bible Readings

- Sunday: Acts 10-12
- Monday: Micah 5-7
- Tuesday: Nahum 1-3
- Wednesday: 2 Kings 20-21
- Thursday: Zephaniah 1-3
- Friday: Habakkuk 1-3
- Saturday: Psalms 79-81

The Conversion of Saul — Fill in the Blanks

Acts 9:1-9 tells the story of the conversion of Saul, who later was known as the apostle Paul. Read the story and fill in the blanks from the list to the right. Some words are used more than once. You can insert the correct number rather than writing the word if you wish.



Meanwhile Saul, still breathing _____ and _____ against the _____ of the Lord, went to the _____ and asked him for letters to the _____ at _____ so that if he found any who belonged to the _____, men or women, he might bring them bound to _____. Now as he was going along and approaching _____, suddenly a _____ from _____ flashed around him. He _____ to the _____ and heard a _____ saying to him, “Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?” He asked, “Who are you, Lord?” The reply came, “I am _____, whom you are _____. But get up and enter the _____, and you will be _____ what you are to do.” The men who were traveling with him stood _____ because they heard the _____ but saw no one. Saul got up from the _____, and though his eyes were _____, he could see _____; so they led him by the hand and brought him into _____. For _____ days he was without sight, and neither ate nor _____.

1. persecuting
2. disciples
3. three
4. high priest
5. nothing
6. Damascus (3)
7. Way
8. threats
9. heaven
10. fell
11. drank
12. ground (2)
13. Jerusalem
14. murder
15. light
16. voice (2)
17. Jesus
18. city
19. synagogues
20. told
21. speechless
22. open

Solution (in the order they appear): threats, murder, disciples, high priest, synagogues, Damascus, Way, Jerusalem, Damascus, light, heaven, fell, ground, voice, Jesus, persecuting, city, told, speechless, voice, ground, open, nothing, Damascus, three, drank.