

*"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 . . . Consider him who endured such opposition from sinners, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart." Hebrews 12:1-3*

This is hard. There's no two ways about it. It's been over eight months now since our lives shifted dramatically, over eight months of distancing and masks and changes in pretty much every habit. We're ready for this to be over. We want to spend Thanksgiving in groups of family and friends. We want to worship on Christmas Eve in packed church buildings. And we can't. Not yet. Because every day the number of new Coronavirus cases increases dramatically as the infection rate surges. More than a quarter of a million people in this country alone have died of COVID-19. Virginia has not been as hard hit as other nearby states, and new restrictions set by the Governor of the Commonwealth went into effect on Monday to keep it that way. We're tired. We want this to be over, knowing full well that we'll be in it for some months longer.

Where do we find hope? Where do we get the strength to keep on keeping on in order to protect those we love as well as people we'll never meet, not to mention our very selves? Where is the good news in this time of so much that is distressing?

For us as Christians, the good news is always found in Jesus. Our eyes fixed on Jesus, we can see a bigger picture than our own frustration and the inconveniences we've experienced, profound though some of them are. We can see Jesus in the faces of the ill and dying, in the faces of medical professionals and family members who care for those with COVID-19. Our eyes fixed on Jesus, we recognize others as our own siblings and our compassion grows.

Our eyes fixed on Jesus, we find the best in the news we read in newspapers or hear on podcasts. Amid distressing projections, we celebrate in hope that we are moving closer than ever to an effective and widely available vaccine. We trust fully that this pandemic will end. It will not last forever.

Our eyes fixed on Jesus, we remain faithful in worship and in daily prayer. We trust that prayer is concrete action for the sake of the world and for the sake of our own spiritual, mental and physical health. As we stay close to Jesus in prayer, our fear is overcome by hope, our worry is replaced by trust, and we can breathe again.

Our eyes fixed on Jesus, we do not grow weary or lose heart. We've been doing this for eight months now. We can do it for the duration. We are tired, but we are strong. We are frustrated, but we are resilient. We are made in the image of God, and that means we have more capacity for life, for goodness and for hope than we usually remember. We can do this.

So with your eyes fixed on Jesus, keep on keeping on. Continue to be faithful in worship and in daily prayer. Continue to do what you can to support and assist others in need. Continue to let others support and assist you. Continue to look for Jesus in the faces of others and to look for his good news in the news you hear. Don't let down your guard against COVID-19 now. And don't be afraid. Because God who created you is always with you, and loves you fiercely.