**Greetings to the saints of Mission Presbytery!**

That Katie Ledecky.

She won the Women's 1500 meter free in 15 minutes and change, setting a new Olympic Record. She was several meters ahead of her two closest competitors. She won her TWELFTH Olympic gold medal, which ties her with two other women for the most Olympic medals. The commentators said that if you added up the meets and events in which she's competed, plus all of her practice time, she has been swimming for something like 23,000 miles: almost the circumference of the globe.

Fifteen minutes she swam. That means she swam two lengths of the pool, 100 meters, in about a minute. And she did it over and over again, consistently, one arm in front of the other, each lap pulling further ahead of the others. Then she got out of the pool and walked over to the camera like she was just returning from a trip to HEB. (I know what ***I*** would have looked like, assuming I'd been able to finish the race!)

Someone suggested to her that she might be able to let up some on her practice time, now that she's considered the second-best swimmer in American history (second only to Michael Phelps). She smiled and headed back to practice some more. It reminded me of the great American cellist, Yo-Yo Ma. Someone asked him once why he felt the need to keep practicing, gifted as he is. His response: "I think I might be getting better."

What impressed me the most about her, maybe even more than her stunning accomplishments was this. When the reporter asked her what it was like for her during the race, at first she said she "zoned out" for a bit. Then she began to think of all of the people who had helped her get to this point: her coaches and teachers, her family, and even a group of boys she knew in Florida who had "encouraged" her back in the day! All this time she "just kept swimming" (thank you, Nemo), doing what she had trained and practiced to do for so many years - and on the day of her record-breaking victory, she revealed that she had been swimming with what we would call her communion of saints, surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses.

So many of the Olympic events are team events. Think of those five darling young men on the USA team who had started their gymnast careers as competitors, but ended up earning a team bronze medal for their work together. Gymnast Simone Biles is a stunning athlete all on her own. But as outstanding as she is, it took all of her teammates working together to earn their gold medal. And we learned from Katie Ledecky that even a 1500 meter "individual" event was not individual at all.

Sounds to me like Katie might be familiar with the book of Hebrews:

> ***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.*** *(Hebrews 12:1-3, NRSV)*

Takeaways for us from this week's Olympics?

- *Practice makes perfect.*
- *"Individuals" who think they don't need a team are most to be pitied.*
- *We all need a cloud of witnesses*.

That's one of the things you do best, Mission Presbytery. You know that it is as we connect, learn, and serve that we flourish. We are indeed better together!

Here's your homework this week: think of the ones who make up your particular cloud of witnesses. If they're still living, let them know how important they are to you. If they're not, thank God for their presence and their influence in your life. And let yourself be buoyed along in your journey by their support.

**Presbyter Sightings**

**August 1** - Zoom with the Connect Committee; staff annual reviews
**August 3** - Zoom with General Council
**August 4** - Preach for McAllen First
**August 5** - Zoom with Commission on Ministry
**August 6** - Meet with Staff and the AC for New Life/Nueva Vida
**August 7** - Zoom with Synod EP Forum and Presbytery Leadership Team
**August 10** - Zoom with Committee on Representation and Participation
**August 11** - Preach for San Antonio Oak Hills
**August 12** - Zoom with Mo-Ranch Board
**August 14** - Meeting and lunch with Human Resource Team
**August 15** - Zoom with Committee on the Office of General Assembly
**August 18** - Preach for Austin New Covenant Fellowship
**August 20** - Conversation about General Assembly with a group from Westminster Manor in Austin
**August 21-23** - Synod EP Forum meets in Bentonville, Arkansas