

11.18.2018 Trinity 25 (1 John 3:1-8)

The Tour de France is not just the world's biggest bike race, it's the largest annual sporting event on the planet. According to its organizers, about 12 million spectators line the road to cheer on the cyclists, and 3.5 billion people in 190 countries tune in to watch this race each year. In 2018, the 2,082 mile race was divided into 21 stages with cyclists riding on a variety of challenging routes including hills, high mountains, and road courses. After three grueling weeks the riders finally made it to the finish line in Paris, and for the sixth time in seven years, the team from Great Britain claimed victory.

Winning this race six times in the last seven years is an extraordinary feat, but what makes this team's success truly amazing is the fact that a British cyclist had not won this race since its inception in 1903. You think your favorite team is hopeless? The Brits were a team on a 110 year losing streak. Year after year they performed so terribly that one of the top bike manufacturers refused to sell bikes to them because they were afraid it would hurt their sales if other professionals saw them using their products. Consider the facts and you can't help but wonder what changed. What explains such an incredible turnaround and the newfound astonishing success of the team from Great Britain? The simple answer might surprise you. I recently read an article titled: "This Coach improved every tiny thing by one percent and here's what happened." The article told the story of Dave Brailsford, who began working with the British cycling team in 2003.

Brailsford implemented a new approach in British cycling, one he called the "aggregation of marginal gains." His strategy was to seek a one percent improvement in everything you could think of that goes into riding a bike, from nutrition, to training, to the ergonomics of the bike seat and the weight of the tires. He looked at every area. He found the pillow that offered each cyclist the most restful sleep, he researched the best method to promote muscle recovery, he even paid a doctor to teach his riders the best way to wash their hands to avoid catching a cold. Brailsford believed that if his team could successfully execute the strategy he proposed in 2010, they could accomplish what a 110 year losing streak would suggest was impossible: He thought they could win the Tour de France in five years. He was wrong, they won it in three.

Great Britain's cycling team achieved the seemingly impossible simply by improving every tiny thing by one percent. Keep that thought in mind and consider these words from our Epistle this morning. St. John writes, "*Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when He shall appear, we shall be like Him; for we shall see Him as He is. And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as He is pure*" (1 John 3:2-3). In these verses, John tells us that we are now, and evermore, children of God. This is who we are. No matter what you face, no matter how you feel, you are a beloved child of God, and though we do not know in this life *what we shall be*, we rest in the assurance that as sons and daughters of God, when our Lord appears, when we see "*the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory*" (Matthew 24:30), *we shall be like Him*, we shall be made like Christ, *for we shall see Him as He is*.

Bring to mind our Lord's Second Coming, picture that day, when Christ will send "*His angels with a great sound of a trumpet,*" and they shall "*gather together His elect... from one end of heaven to the other*" (Matthew 24:31). On that day the creature will see the Creator *as He is*. Almighty God will be seen *as He is* in Christ. No longer will we live by faith, from that moment on we will live by sight. What no eye has seen, what no ear has heard, what is unspeakably glorious and truly fulfills our soul's deepest desire will at last be made manifest through the light and glory radiating from God's One and Only Son.

My friends, the world couldn't care less about the unfathomable truth of our Lord's Second Coming as it revealed in the pages of Holy Scripture, but as beloved children of God, this is our hope, and St. John tells us, "*every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as He is pure.*" It is the will of God for His people to be "*conformed to the image of His Son*" (Romans 8:29), and the child of God whose hope is grounded in the expectation of seeing God *as He is* will strive toward the goal of Christ-like holiness. Such a goal might seem impossible, and we may never attain perfect holiness this side of heaven, but as God's children our hope is in Him and the goal for which we strive can be nothing less than perfect holiness. After all, it was our Lord in His *Sermon on the Mount* who said, "*Be ye therefore perfect, even as*

*your Father which is in heaven is perfect” (Matthew 5:48).*

We often view the journey toward our most challenging goals as one that requires tremendous change and sacrifice in our lives, and while there are certainly moments when that is true, I believe it is far more common to reach a goal in a way that is similar to the path that led Britain’s cycling team to victory. I believe that most of the time God isn’t calling us to a single, monumental sacrifice, but instead He calls us to a series of small sacrifices that lead us step-by-step into more perfect union and communion with Him. We are the sons and daughters of God. God is our perfect Heavenly Father, and as our Father He views the everyday events in our lives as opportunities for growth. Growth in love. Growth in obedience. Growth in the process of sanctification, and we must embrace every circumstance as an opportunity for growth as well, one small step at a time.

The path to holiness, the path that leads us to be *conformed to the image of His Son*, is not meant to be journeyed in leaps and bounds. This path is instead an aggregation of marginal gains. It is a daily endeavor in which we strive to improve every tiny thing just one percent at a time by considering our every thought, every word, and every deed; seeking to bring all aspects of our lives into conformity with God’s perfect will.

In conclusion, consider this thought: Michelangelo was once asked how he completed a truly magnificent sculpture and he explained the gradual, step-by-step process by saying, “I saw the angel in the marble and carved until I set him free.” Beloved children of God, like an angelic image that remains hidden in a slab of marble, *it doth not yet appear what we shall be*, but know this: you are God’s masterpiece. The Omnipotent hand of God is at work in every detail of your life, and His Holy Word declares the glorious truth that there will be a day *when He shall appear*, a day when we will be everything He created us to be. So, remember who you are, and remember in Whose hands you are. Anchor your hope in our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, and rest in the blessed assurance that *“He who began a good work in you will bring it to completion in the day of Christ Jesus” (Philippians 1:6).*