“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.”

(Hebrews 12: 1-2 NIV)

Each year as we approach Easter there appears a series of stories and articles in the news and magazines that attempt to cast doubt on the story of the resurrection. It is part of the battle between good and evil that occurs in our world and will continue until Christ returns.

For me, it is always inspiring to look back at the lives of the first Christians to see what they endured for their faith. Although it is hard to verify things from so long ago tradition tells us the fate of the original twelve apostles:

**Peter**: Crucified upside down.

**Andrew**: Tied rather than nailed to a cross, so that he would suffer for a longer time before dying. Andrew lived for two days, during which he preached to passersby.

**James** (Son of Zebedee): Beheaded.

**John**: Passed away peacefully from natural causes.

**Philip**: Crucified.

**Bartholomew**: Crucified.

**Thomas**: Killed with a spear.

**Matthew**: Killed with a sword.

**James** (Son of Alphaeus): Beaten and stoned to death at the age of 94.

**Thaddaeus**: Crucified.

**Simon the Zealot**: Crucified.

**Judas** **Iscariot**: Suicide.

To that list we can add the Apostle Paul who was beheaded in Rome. In fact, an article I read recently estimated that in the first 300 years after the first Easter 2,000,000 Christians were killed for their faith. That’s an astounding number since the population of the world then was so much smaller than it is today.

It is even more astounding because these folks would have been spared if they had only renounced their faith. And yet they refused to do so. That should tell us something about the first Christians and those who walked and talked with Jesus. They believed! They believed he died on the cross and then was resurrected from the dead. They believed to the point that they were willing to give their lives. That many people would not willingly give their lives for something that was not true.

The Easter story is true! Be motivated by that fact and live with joy in your heart. Know that your savior, who loves you and died for you, lives today and forever more!

Happy Easter!

Pastor Tim