

Raised to Run

‘See! The winter is past; the rains are over and gone. Flowers appear on the earth. The season of singing has come.’ (S of S 2: 10, 11)

Maybe only long distance runners understand: an unpredictable convergence of things that makes for a great race. Balmy weather, body aches becoming bursts of strength, the inspiration of a flowering tree, managing to keep pace with the guy just ahead of you...all good, all outside of one’s control.

Kind of like new life. Who likes to be out of control? Even if unexpected news is good, we may first find it disorienting. It took the disciples a few minutes to ‘get’ the resurrection. It shook them up before it freed them. Maybe that’s why I still train throughout the year to run half-marathons: I need to rely on the One who is faithful, even if I cannot control the variables that greet me race-day.

Not long ago, I ran a new race and was disappointed. Instead of inspiring, the 13.1 miles of cityscape droned on and drained me. I lost time and my body felt weakened by, in the words of Christina Rossetti, this ‘long-drawn straining effort across the waste.’ I wondered if my racing days were over.

Unsure of motives—staving off a midlife crisis?—I resolved to train harder and set my sight on an Easter-ish run 6 months ahead. The key to training is consistency and one long run a week, come what may.

I even set a higher goal for this Spring run. Race day came. Preparing to launch with my younger ‘time class,’ I felt outclassed and marveled at my presumption.

Yet I also marveled at the ground I had pounded in prep for it: running at dawn through the steaming parks of Shanghai as folks gathered to do Tai Chai or sing ‘P’Opera,’ taking a wrong turn in Manila and passing out momentarily due to unusually high pollutants, climbing a village road outside Mexico City then charging down in flight from canine ‘friends,’ sprinting alongside Chicago’s Lake Michigan in a freeze that had turned the sea into a glacier, chugging along a fogged-in Oregon coastline with only neon shoes to light the way, pierced by a cold rain that became an ice storm in PA. (Note to self: ice hurts...)

Greater than my stubborn vanity was the One who ‘keeps my steps firm’ (PS 37:23) and who draws me into His good will as I resolve to ‘run in the path of His commands, He who has set my heart free.’ (PS 119: 32) In truth, wherever I go, I run with Him, toward Him, from Him. And I trust Him with the variables.

The gun went off and I wondered how long I could keep pace. OK at first: the weather was crazy perfect, and the course (a new one) was tree-lined with blossoms so profuse that they rained upon

us. I felt strong yet sure I would slow down toward the end. Never happened. I crossed the line under time with joy and unexpected strength. He is risen. He raises me up to run the race.