

09.29.21 – A Weekly Word for Covenant Church

Title: “Running Alongside”

Scripture Reading: [Colossians 1:24-29](#)

Reflection: Rev. Amy Schenkel

Megan (my daughter) and I watch marathons and triathlons the way that some people watch baseball or football. We have our favorite athletes, we know the big races they’ll be competing in, and we review their stats when they finish. And like with the Cubs winning the world series in 2016, or the time when Michigan fumbled a punt which was recovered by Michigan State to win the 2015 football game in the last second, there are memorable moments in these competitions that still evoke deep emotion within us.

One of those moments was the Marathon Olympic Trials in 2016. Shalane Flanagan was a favorite to make the Olympic team, and she had broken away from the pack in the early miles to take an early lead alongside her friend Amy Cragg. The race looked like it was going to be simple until Shalane began showing major symptoms of dehydration at mile 22. In her own words, given the chills and delirium, she was experiencing most runners would have dropped out at that point, but a lot was on the line. As we watched the end of the race unfold on TV, we could see Amy staying at Shalane’s side, encouraging her, directing her, talking her through the end of this race. Shalane remembers Amy saying, “I’m staying right with you, one mile at a time.” Amy crossed the finish line first, followed by Des Linden, and Shalane was the final person to make the Olympic team as she finished third. Without Amy by her side, it was clear that Shalane would not have had the mental, emotional or physical strength to finish.

Paul’s words in Colossians 1:24-29 talk about the suffering he feels as he presents the word of God to the church. Like the marathoners, I’m sure he experienced suffering mentally, emotionally, and physically, but for a clear purpose: “to proclaim him (Jesus), admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone perfect in Christ.” This purpose was strong enough to overcome ridicule from people who liked him better as a staunch prosecutor of Christians, the worry about where his next paycheck was coming from, and the exhaustion from all his travels.

How was it that Paul was able to persevere through this suffering to continue in this calling? The answer is in verse 29: “To this end I labor, *struggling with all his energy*, which so powerfully works in me.” The idea of being one with Christ, having Christ within us, is a mystery. There aren’t words to fully explain it. But the image of Amy running alongside Shalane, coaxing her through the last few miles of this excruciating race, is similar to what I think Paul means when he says he is “struggling with all his (Jesus’) energy.” I imagine that when the work of ministry is exhausting, when the calling of being a Christian puts me in uncomfortable situations, when situations cause doubt to threaten my faith, that Jesus is running alongside me, spending his energy to coax me through to the end of this earthly race.

Prayer:

Lord, when I choose to follow you, I know that does not come without cost. Making counter-cultural choices, spending time with the people Jesus would spend time with, being generous with the resources you’ve given

me- all this can leave me exhausted and sometimes hurt. Help me to know and feel your presence right beside me. Help me to wait on you, so that my energy will be renewed like the eagles, that I may run and not grow weary, walk and not be faint. Amen.

Action Item for the Day/Week:

Are there any situations that you are dealing with right now where you could use the energy of Christ? Allow Jesus to run alongside you. Tap into all of his energy.

Songs for today:

[You Are My Strength](#)