

Derek Redmond was a British runner who at 19 had broken Britain's national record in the 400 meter race. Just before the 1988 Olympic Games in Seoul, he injured his Achilles tendon and had to withdraw. After 5 surgeries he came back for the 1992 Olympics in Barcelona and he was determined to win.

Now, the 400-meter race is pretty exciting at Olympic levels and so there were 65,000 people in the stadium when Derek ran his semifinal heat to qualify for the Olympic 400 meter finals. Among those 65,000 people was Derek's father, Jim.

The race begins and Derek breaks through the pack to seize the lead. "Keep it up, keep it up," his father Jim says to himself. Heading down the backstretch, only 175 meters from the finish line, Derek is a shoo-in to win this semifinal heat and qualify for the Olympic finals.

But then Derek hears a pop. It's his right hamstring. He pulls up lame...his leg quivering, Derek begins to hop on the other leg, and then he slows down and falls to the track. Medical personnel run toward him as he sprawls on the ground, holding his right hamstring.

At the very same moment, there is a stir at the top of the stands. Jim Redmond, seeing his son in trouble, begins to race down from the top row. He is pushing toward the track, sidestepping some people and bumping into others. All he can think about is getting to his son, to help him up. He is absolutely single-minded about this, and isn't going to be stopped by anyone.

On the track, Derek realizes that his dream of an Olympic medal is gone. He is alone, bereft of realizing his dream and in pain. The other runners streak across the finish line, with Steve Lewis of the United States winning the race.

Tears pour down Derek's face, but, when the medical crew arrives with a stretcher, Derek tells them, "No, there's no way I'm getting on that stretcher. I'm going to finish my race." And so he lifts himself to his feet, ever so slowly and carefully, and he starts hobbling down the track.

Suddenly, the crowd realizes that Derek isn't dropping out of the race. He isn't limping off the track in defeat, but is actually continuing on one leg, in a fiercely determined effort to make it to the finish line. One painful step at a time, each one a little slower and more agonizing than the one before, Derek limps onward, and the crowd begins to cheer for him. The fans rise to their feet and their cries grow louder and louder, building into a thundering roar.

At that moment, Jim Redmond reaches the bottom of the stands, vaults over the railing, dodges a security guard, and runs out to his

son — with two security people running after him. "That's my son out there," he yells back at his pursuers, "and I'm going to help him."

Jim reaches his son at the final curve, about 120 meters from the finish line, and wraps his arm around his waist. "I'm here, son," Jim says gently, hugging his boy. "We'll finish together."

Derek puts his arms around his father's shoulders and sobs. Together, arm in arm, father and son struggle toward the finish line with 65,000 people cheering, clapping and crying. Just a few steps from the end, with the crowd in an absolute frenzy, Jim releases the grip he has on his son so that Derek can cross the finish line by himself.

"I'm the proudest father alive," Jim Redmond tells the press afterward, with tears in his eyes. "I'm prouder of him than I would have been if he had won the gold medal. It took a lot of guts for him to do what he did."

Together, they kept a promise they had made to finish the race, no matter what.<sup>1</sup>

A father rushes onto the track to help his injured son finish his race. Likewise, the Holy Spirit comes along side of us in our race of life.

The first to hear about this amazing, mysterious presence were the disciples in the upper room. Part of Jesus' final message to his disciples is how he will continue to teach, encourage and pray for them when he is not physically present with them. He tells them the nature of his presence will change. Jesus will ask God for a paraclete to be with them for ever.

In Greek, the word used is 'paraclete' - you heard it as Advocate in our reading today. That's one definition, and in some ways, unfortunate because today's cultural

definition limits the sense of the word that Jesus used. Untranslated, the sense of the word paraclete is 'one who comes along side'. I like this, and I think it made a difference to the disciples, to John's community and it makes a difference for us, too.

Jesus' promise of a paraclete made a difference because he knew the disciples were scared. He knew they felt abandoned. He knew these feelings would only increase as the events of the next days unfolded. Jesus also knew how difficult it is to love one another even as he loved us. He knew they had only begun to let his ways, his life, his commands seep into his call to a new way of living. They needed to know that they would not be alone. They needed to know where their help would come from.

We can all relate to feeling scared and abandoned at times. Scared to hear the results of the medical test you took last week.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://sports.espn.go.com/espn/espn25/story?page=moments/94> - ESPN 100 Most Memorable Moments of the last 25 years.

Scared of what you see in your neighborhood. Scared of what you see on the news around the world. Afraid you will fail, or maybe, afraid you will succeed. Most know the hurt and pain of abandonment or betrayal by a friend, parent, child or beloved. Or abandoned by medical professionals who don't take insurance or employers who don't offer insurance. Abandoned by mortgage companies and banks. And we need to know, too, that we are not alone.

"I will not leave you orphaned; I am coming to you."

We are not alone. Jesus promises to send One to our side. This One is the Spirit of truth and the Spirit of life.

When we are confused, beside us the Spirit will guide and teach us.

When we are scared, the Spirit strengthens and encourages us.

When we are hurt and alone, the Spirit will sit beside us; the Spirit walks with us.

And, as the Spirit works beside us to comfort and keep us, we see it working in us. We begin to see Christ's own love in action as we are called to come along the side of others.

Last week we wrote letters to end hunger here and around the world.

For many years, First Trinity has felt called to come along side people who need food, clothing, and other assistance and the staff of CFLS.

We have been and are called to come along side many, many people of varying abilities through our years together.

Christ's love will be seen at the WIN meeting tomorrow night as people of this city continue to demand that the mayor and city government honor their pledges for services to the homeless to get them off the street.

Whenever you, like Jim Redmond, struggle mightily to stand beside, walk beside and support family, friend and neighbor, the Spirit has come, Christ is present and the call and command has been answered.

Thanks be to God.

Amen.