

Six-year-old Charlie decided one Saturday morning to fix his parents pancakes. He found a big bowl and spoon, pulled a chair to the counter, opened the cupboard and pulled out the heavy flour canister, spilling it on the floor. He scooped some of the flour into the bowl with his hands, mixed in most of a cup of milk and added some sugar, leaving a floury trail on the floor which by now had a few tracks left by his kitten. Charlie was covered with flour and getting frustrated. He wanted this to be something very good for Mom and Dad, but it was getting very bad. He didn't know what to do next. He didn't know how to make the stove work.

As he stood there, he saw his cat licking from the bowl of mix and reached to push her away, knocking the egg carton to the floor. Frantically he tried to clean up this monumental mess but slipped on the eggs, getting his pajamas white and sticky. And just then he saw Dad standing at the door. Big crocodile tears welled up in Charlie's eyes. All he'd wanted to do was something good, but he'd made a terrible mess. He didn't know if his dad would scold him for making such a mess.

Then his father walked straight through all the mess on the floor. He picked up his crying son, hugged him and loved, even if it meant getting his own pajamas covered with flour, eggs and whatever other items were spilled on his son. That's how God deals with us. We try to do something good in life, but it turns into a mess. Sometimes it seems like all we can do is just stand there in tears because we can't think of anything else to do. That's when God picks us up and loves us and forgives us, even though some of our mess gets all over Him. **What happens when our plans fall through? When we've forgotten how to live?** That's when our heavenly father picks us in his arms and loves us.

The words of our text and Gospel lesson follow the words of our text from last week, from John 14. Jesus is still in the upper room with his disciples on Maundy Thursday. There was a time coming soon that he was going to be leaving them. For three years, they had followed him and now he's leaving. What were they going to do? How were they going to live without Jesus? What were they going to do next? I can only how much alone they felt in that upper room.

For many of us in Wisconsin, life changed on March 25th. People were told to stay home to keep everyone safe. I'm not here to debate that order at all this morning. As the weeks continued to move on, there was a very real feeling that some people faced. People feel alone. Yet, we all know that this is going to pass soon. But can you imagine how the disciples felt when Jesus said that he was going to leave them. He wasn't going to be gone for a few weeks or months. They didn't know when he was coming back. While he was gone, he gives his disciples a powerful promise. **"And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever— the Spirit of truth."** He understood how alone the disciples were feeling. He saw men with troubled hearts.

Yet, he promises that he is going to send an advocate, a helper. That same helper who brought them to faith. The same helper who would be with them in times that they could not even imagine yet. Without this helper, the Holy Spirit, we cannot do what he also commands. **"If you love me, keep my commands." "The one who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love them and show myself to them."** The Holy Spirit has never stopped pouring out his grace on us since. Suddenly, divine help, far beyond even our imagination, is handed to us again and again!

In the Greek world, that word, Helper or Advocate, was sometimes used for an athlete, who would run alongside a tired out soldier and cheer him on. Jesus promises us that the Holy Spirit is the one who runs right by our side, fresh and vigorous when we're getting all worn out, to encourage and keep us going.

As I was thinking about that this week, I ran across the story of Derek Redmond. It is probably a name that is all that familiar. Derek Redmond was a star runner from the country of Great Britain. He went to the 1988 Olympic games in Seoul. He was to run the 400 meter race. He was a top contender in the world. His hopes were dashed only 10 minutes before the race because of an Achilles tendon injury. He would undergo five surgeries over the next year. This was the same runner who had shattered the British 400-meter at the age of 19. So, when the 1992 Games arrived in Barcelona, this was his time, his moment, his stage, to show the world just how good he was and who we was.

Derek's father, Jim, had accompanied him to Barcelona, just as he did for all world competitions. They were as close as a father and son could be. Inseparable, really. The best of friends. When Derek ran, it was as if his father were running right next to him. The day came for the semi-finals of the 400 meter came. Derek was expected to be one of the highest contender, if not the highest. He had staged a remarkable come-back. His father took his place in the stands. 65,000 fans were cheering the runners on.

The race begins and Redmond breaks from the pack and quickly seizes the lead. *"Keep it up, keep it up,"* Jim says to himself. Down the backstretch, only 175 meters away from finishing, Redmond was a shoo-in to make the finals. Suddenly, he hears a pop in his right hamstring. He pulls up lame, as if he had been shot. He falls down on the track. The medical staff begins to move to Redmond. His dad comes running down from the stands. Even though he had no credentials to be on the track, he later told the media that he was not going to be stopped. The security people quickly figured out this was his dad and didn't stop him.

On the track, Redmond realizes his dream of an Olympic medal is gone. Tears run down his face. *"All I could think was, 'I'm out of the Olympics -- again,'"* he would say. As the medical crew arrives with a stretcher, Redmond tells them, *"No, there's no way I'm getting on that stretcher. I'm going to finish my race."* Then, in front of millions of people both in the stands and TV, he lifts himself to his feet, and starts to hobble down the track. The people in the stands realize that he was not dropping out of the race. Other runners had already finished the race. There was Redmond hobbling down the track, trying to finish the race. The roar of the crowd got louder. In total pain, he tried to finish the race. But he couldn't.

That was when his dad showed up. His dad wrapped his arm around his waist. He said to his son, "We'll finish together." Together, arm in arm, father and son, with 65,000 people cheering, clapping and crying, they went down the track. Jim released the grip he had on his son, just before the finish line, so his son could finish the race himself.

That's the kind of helper we have in Jesus and the Holy Spirit -- the helpers that run alongside of us in life. They fill us with a constant supply of strength to live. So, when our plans fall through? When we forget how to live? Live with Jesus. He will always give us what we need. Amen.