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Easter Sunday 2006, April 16  
Our Lady Queen of Peace

Tomorrow in Massachusetts more than 20,000 men and women will participate  
in the 110<sup>th</sup> world famous Boston Marathon.

It is the most storied race in the world.

And, for good reason.

It takes a lot to run that rugged race-course  
inspired by the Greek runner Phillipides  
who ran the 26 miles-distance from Athens to a place called Marathon  
in Greece some 500 years before Christ.

There are the months of training. Days of running for hours, often alone.

Aches and pains that last for days and weeks,

sometimes long-standing injuries that stay with a runner for life.

Marathon running is not for everybody,

after all some of us can't run—whether because of age or body shape or  
ability.

The Boston race course is divided into 3 parts: 1

4 miles of fun, 8 miles of sweat, and 4 miles of hell.

This breakdown is a lot like our lives, I think.

In life, there is a good portion of fun, a fair amount of work, and a taste of hell.

Thankfully, the smallest part is hell, but it is there, nonetheless.

It has been said that in life there is no finish line,

for the resurrection tells us that our lives never end.

But today's resurrection runners tell us how we can run the race of our lives.

The fun, the work, and even the hell.

Looking to Peter, the beloved disciple, and Mary Magdalene,

we see them as three good people, trying to be faithful,

imperfect enough for the Lord to love them.

And, their running shows us, among other things,

something very important for our lives:

The importance of a running partner.

The early disciples did not go at it alone.

They were born as community.

One of the first things Jesus did was to pick some disciples

so that they would not be alone—or him be alone for that matter.

After he dies, they had each other for mutual comfort,

to share stories, pain, grief, and sadness.

The God of creation who said it was not good for us to be alone

was faithful to this when his Son began building his Kingdom.

Having running partners is a consolation, for it is painful to go through life alone.

Very painful.

Perhaps this is why Jesus experienced such emotional pain in his death.  
He felt that his running partners left him and betrayed him—even his Father,  
so he prays on the cross,  
“My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?”

But having a friend to run the race of our lives is more than a consolation,  
it is a reminder of the presence of God.  
That we are never alone.  
Never.

Working to sustain our friendships and marriages and community relationships  
is one of the most important tasks God asks of us.  
His entrusting Mary and the beloved disciple to each other just moments before his death  
suggests his dying wish that his most loved ones not be alone.  
It also calls us to make a commitment to Jesus on the cross  
that we will be men and women of life-sustaining relationship.  
A commitment that moves us to an honesty that could sometimes be  
embarrassing or risky,  
a generosity that empties our heart only to be filled with the love that receives it.

All of us, all of God’s people are his loved ones,  
and we are not to leave each other alone.  
Again, the cross and the resurrection call us home to the earliest of Scripture commands  
that we are indeed our brother’s and sister’s keeper.  
Whether that brother or sister shares our last name, race, citizenship, or personality type,  
we are responsible for them.

The most hellish part of the Boston Marathon is Heartbreak Hill  
an 80-foot climb that really can be hell to legs running for more than 20 miles.  
While the individual runners have to push and lift their own legs to keep on going,  
they need the momentum of the cheers from people around them.  
They need the fresh, cold water to be handed to them to cool their bodies  
and rehydrate their parched throats.  
They need the hope that is expressed on the optimistic faces of others  
when theirs is grimacing and cringing in pain and exhaustion.

We all climb our own Heartbreak Hills. No one can climb them for us.  
When our loved ones die, when we face our failures,  
when we sit in doubt and darkness,  
we feel the despair that has us thirst for cool, fresh water from someone  
who loves us,  
for sometimes we are too tired or sad or depressed or grief-stricken  
to make our way to find that drink of whatever we thirst for ourselves.  
The Heartbreak Hill that was Calvary did not break Jesus,  
for his Father pulled him out of death into life.  
And, the good news today is that our Heartbreak Hills will not break us either.

Not even the most powerful, steep and seemingly permanent ones.  
Not even death.  
Our running partners cannot climb or Heartbreak Hills for us,  
but they can make them possible to be conquered.

Peter and Mary and the beloved disciple had each other.

The resurrection is God's promise that we will live forever  
in joy and peace and love.

It is also the promise that this eternal life will not be alone.

In heaven, we will be together with our deceased parents and grandparents  
and friends and siblings and spouses,

even those people we've never met—

with what is believed to be the more than 90 billion people whom God created  
since the beginning of time.

This is surely a mystery.

One that, like those first runners on that first Easter day, did not fully understand.

But their belief in the resurrection prompted them to make a commitment  
to keep on running, together.

We have made the same commitment to have company  
during our life's fun, its work, and even its hell.

Thank God we won't be alone. Our lives will be filled FOREVER.

No wonder we sing Alleluia today, for Jesus Christ is RISEN!