

Being told that we were only allowed out to exercise once a day prompted Marian and me to decide to go for an early morning run every day. Luckily the weather has been nice. And we had done some running while we were away. Why not keep it up, we thought?

I have two favourite parts of the run. One favourite part is the first part when we set off. I feel strong. I'm not in the least out of breath. Everything feels fine.

Of course, I know that it would be foolish to overdo it at this point in the run. I know I am going to need every ounce of breath. So my stride is measured. And I am relaxed enough to look about me at the beauty of the spring morning and maybe chat with Marian as we jog along.

Then my least favourite part of the run starts. I stop chatting to Marian. I lose all interest in the beauty of nature. I start counting down the milestones that take me closer to the end of the run. I wonder why I ever agreed to do this.

But then comes my other favourite part. It's the moment I can see the car park in the municipal park over the road from the vicarage. I lengthen my stride. Is there a bit left in the tank? Yes, there is! I am running faster now. If you were being kind you could call this sprinting! Through the car park, watch for traffic, run across the road, turn down Church Lane and sprint now to the vicarage door.

One of my favourite bits of the Bible references running. Hebrews 12: 1-2 reads as follows:

*Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, who for the sake of the joy that was set before him endured the cross, disregarding its shame, and has taken his seat at the right hand of the throne of God.*

These verses come at the end of a long list of all the things that people of faith have endured because they trusted in the promises of God (You can read about them in Hebrews 11). I often think of these people, 'the cloud of witnesses'; people whose lives are retold in Scripture, along with people whose acts of endurance have never been recorded but whose faith means a great deal to me personally; they are all in my 'cloud of witnesses'. They spur me on. As, of course, does Jesus himself, the perfecter of our faith.

I think we are all aware that this pandemic is going to be a real slog. Most people I speak to are doing fine at the moment, but are acutely aware that there is a long way to go. We know we need to pace ourselves. So these verses from Hebrews can give us our prayer today:

*Loving God, Creator of the beauty of spring mornings, Giver of life; Keep us all mindful of our individual clouds of witnesses, whose endurance and faith inspire us. Give us the strength to set aside the sin that clings so closely so we can remain focused on the race that is set before us. Guide us by your Holy Spirit who points us to Jesus Christ the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, who set aside his honour and endured great suffering before taking his seat at your right hand to intercede for us. In his name we pray. Amen.*