

Maybe it's the time of year, but I've been a little blue lately. Wondering if I am doing what God wants me to do, if I make a difference, if my life matters in the giant scheme of things. If you had asked me in my twenties what I would be doing in my fifties, I could have given you the master plan. I had my future all laid out. Then life happened. You know what I mean – unexpected events, difficult choices, even the call of God. It never turns out like you planned!

Rev. Mark Trotter tells a story in a sermon from First United Methodist Church, San Diego that captures it perfectly:

Georgene Johnson...lived in Cleveland, Ohio. She was 42 years old. She was trying to have a good attitude about being 42 years old, so she started running and exercising to keep in shape. She said, "I'm not going to look like I am 42, or at least I am going to look like a good 42."

She did well in her new passion, running farther every day. She thought she would try a little competition and entered a 10K race, which is about six miles. Nervous about her first race, she got up early and arrived at the start of the race. To her surprise there were a lot of people milling around, stretching and getting ready. All of a sudden a voice on the microphone said, "Move to the starting line." "This is it", she thought, and did as the voice commanded. A gun sounded and they were off, like a huge wave, hundreds of runners, sweeping her up. She was in the race.

After about four miles it occurred to her that they ought to be turning around and heading back to the finish line. She wondered why they didn't turn around. She stopped and asked an official, "How come the course isn't turning around?" He said, "Ma'am, you are running the Cleveland Marathon." Twenty-six miles. Her event, the 10K, started a half-hour AFTER the start of the marathon.

Some of us would have stopped right there and said, "That's it, I'm going home." But to her credit, she kept right on going and finished the race. She said, "This is not the race I trained for. This is not the race I entered. But for better or worse, this is the race I am in."

How many of us are in races we didn't train for and didn't enter? Perhaps we or a loved one has received a bad diagnosis from the doctor. Or our job isn't fulfilling, or certain. Or the marriage we thought would be until death parted us is coming undone.

God promises to be with us through all of life. "Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine," God tells us in Isaiah 43:1. The Bible is full of stories of people who are called by God to run a race they didn't train for or enter. Read the story of Abraham or Moses or Esther or Peter or Paul.

Whose race are you running? I can promise you that running God's race is a lot better than running the one you thought you could do. Because on reflection, I know that I matter, that God has called me to be part of his kingdom, that God has equipped me for whatever race I will run. And God will do that for you. God will be with you to the finish line.