

## Viewpoint

# The Marathon for the World We Seek

By Amelia Kegan

I love running long distances. My most recent marathon was a 243-mile race deep in the Moab Desert of Utah. I ran for more than 90 hours with barely any sleep.

At 3 a.m. on my final day, the only thing I could think of was where the next aid station was. I was certain that it was going to be around the next bend. Each time, I was met with darkness and silence. I kept thinking, that I should've been there already.

Fear took over when two hours passed, and I had still not reached the aid station. Terrified, I cried to God for help: "Don't leave me lost out here, Lord."

Just then, I heard footsteps. I saw the headlamp of another runner shining a path in the darkness. I hadn't taken a wrong turn; I wasn't lost. It was just a really long race, and a really long section.

Amid my exhaustion and fear, God answered my prayers. God answered, not by removing my suffering, but by providing another ordinary runner. My companion, too, was cold and tired. We leaned on each other, supported each other, and encouraged each other. Two rather slow runners made it to the finish line, accomplishing something extraordinary.

Memories of that ultramarathon centered me as the 116th Congress was seated early this year. The next two years will be long, and we will think at times that we should have been there by now.

But I firmly believe that our advocacy marathon is one where we will be sustained by God and will be run by ordinary people. The Bible repeatedly shows that when a leader is needed, or courageous action is required, God calls on ordinary people to accomplish the extraordinary.

God picked Moses—a poor shepherd with a stutter—to tell the pharaoh to let his people go. He led them out of Egypt, as they sought refuge from an oppressive regime. Yes, God picked Moses to lead a migrant caravan of asylees across the desert, seeking refuge in a new homeland.

Joseph got caught up in a criminal justice system that valued wealthy people over poor people. This formerly incarcerated individual rose to power by heeding, not denying, a report of impending climate disruption. Joseph, once incarcerated, successfully led Egypt through famine and drought.

Esther, an orphaned Jew became queen, yet risked her life to stop an administrative decree to remove all her people from the kingdom. The king issued an executive order to remove people from a different nation. God called on Esther to stand up and speak out to save her brothers and sisters.

Ruth, a Moabite, followed her mother-in-law, Naomi, to her homeland of Bethlehem. Ruth was not denied entry because of so-called "chain migration." Her gleaning of food assistance did not bar a green card because of a "public charge" designation. Instead, Ruth worked hard and married Boaz.

From Ruth came Obed. From Obed came Jesse, then David. David's lineage eventually leads to Joseph, the husband of Mary, who gave birth to Jesus in a manger.

Jesus was an undocumented child when his parents fled to Egypt to escape an oppressive king. Jesus was wrongfully prosecuted and convicted. He socialized with outcasts. The Messiah was a Dreamer, a refugee, a prisoner—and an underpaid teacher.

In our advocacy marathon, your background doesn't matter. Each of us has a role to play as we journey together during the two years of the 116th Congress—and beyond.

We're going to run or walk one foot in front of the other. Leaning on each other. Encouraging each other. Strengthening each other. Praying for each other along the path of justice as we journey towards that horizon of the world we seek and the kingdom of God.

*Excerpt from a speech delivered during the 2018 Annual Meeting and Quaker Public Policy Institute. ■*