

There is a lie that I tell myself, ~~so very often.~~

One of you will ^{Speaks} ~~tell~~ me of a pastor who remembers names even when having heard them only once. And I tell myself this lie.

I see someone who really knows how to reach young children and communicate with them, and I tell myself this lie.

I encounter someone who is loving and gentle and sincere and I tell myself this lie.

The lie: it must come naturally. ^{to them.} Remembering names, reaching children, being warm and caring must all be natural gifts. ^{positions.} Along with singing well in public, and being organized, and leading with confidence, and being successful in so many ways. I lie to myself and say: these gifts all come naturally.

Because if they are natural gifts, then I am off the hook. You can't blame me for not remembering a name. I didn't get the gift.

You can't blame me if I am harsh and judgemental, I wasn't born a kind and caring person.

You can't blame me if my office is all cluttered. I am not naturally an organized person.

The fact that some of you have worked very hard to learn to remember names, and some of you have struggled to develop the skills to communicate with children and some of you have disciplined yourselves to make yourself organized I don't want to hear. Because it would mean you could expect more from me.

There is a way of talking about the Christian faith that is this same game.

If you believe in Christ and The Holy Spirit is in you, you will naturally love, and give and care. Naturally. The whole Christian life will naturally flow from faith. Naturally.

So that if I do not feel love, or have joy in giving, or have a desire to listen or reach out, or feel like forgiving, I should not be a hypocrite and pretend what is not in my heart. I should just be me.

Maybe you have thought that, lived that. I know that I have.

Then hear these words: 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 God. Consider him who endured such hostility against himself from sinners so that you may not grow weary or lose heart.

The writer of Hebrews knows that the Christian life is a struggle, an exhausting race that requires perseverance. The writer of Hebrews writes these words because she or he knew that you and I could indeed grow weary or lose heart.

And so we are told, consider Jesus.

Did Jesus ever grow weary, get discouraged? Listen to these words:

You faithless generation, How much longer must I be among you? How much longer must I bear with you?

Or the words in the garden: Abba, Father, ~~all things are possible to~~ ^{if you all things are possible,} ~~me.~~ remove this cup from me; yet not what I want but what you want.

Or the words from the cross: My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

What Jesus endured was not natural but it was necessary: What Jesus endured was not easy, but it was for us.

Therefore we are not ^{only} called to lay aside every ~~weight~~ ^{weight} and sin that clings so closely, we are called to lift our drooping hands and strengthen

our weak knees and make straight paths for our feet so that what is lame may not be put out of joint but rather be healed.

Your life is a life that was created for service to God. Where will you find the strength for that service, and the endurance and the perseverance? In the same place that Jesus found his strength.

Again and again we read of Jesus turning to his Father in prayer. A day spent with the crowd and then Jesus would go off by himself to pray. Or off with his disciples to be alone. Daily he needed what the Father provided, daily he needed his friends with him.

Christ has called us together to support one another and to pray together and to receive here in this gathering all that we will need to endure. At the table we receive food for the race. Christ lifts your drooping hands, and strengthens your feeble knees. Christ lifts the weight that drags you down and strips away all the sin that clings so close.

It is a long and grueling race that God has entered you into. Run with all your heart and soul and strength. Christ will see that ~~you~~^{we} will be victorious. Amen.