

From today's psalm:

*May the words of my mouth and the mediations of our hearts
be acceptable to you, O Lord, our strength and our redeemer.*

“Get people moving.”

That's one of the cardinal tenets of the Renewalworks ministry we did here a couple of years ago.

You may remember that – taking the Spiritual Life Survey and applying the results?

We had wrapped up the first phase of that several months before the pandemic hit.

When the folks at Renewalworks urge a congregation to “get people moving” they mean to communicate that we are all on a spiritual journey.

Now let's see who remembers:

Who is personally responsible for your spiritual growth? (*You are.*)

Get moving...

Now, in this age of COVID, we all have been disrupted and shaken and moved around (outside even).

My concern is where all this ultimately leads:

When we finally, gradually emerge from this pandemic era, where will we be?

Will we want to try to *move back* –

retract into past that no longer exists (if it ever really did)?

Or will we aim to *move forward* into a future to which God calls us?

Our friends from St. John the Evangelist are confronted with this question in a very stark way, as they discern their future

hoping to merge with another parish and create a new spiritual home.

But these should be lively questions for all of us.

The people – “the rabble” it says -- in our first reading, from Numbers, are struggling with these very questions.

They're "In the Wilderness" – the title of this book in Hebrew.
The people complaining here are the "chosen people" whom God has liberated from slavery in Egypt.
They've experienced the glorious parting of the Red Sea.
They've gotten what they've longed and prayed for.

But it turns out that moving from slavery to liberation brings its own challenges and frustrations.
They're pining for the "good old days" back in Egypt.

Anyone who's ever taken a family vacation with children knows this dynamic.
You scarcely make it out of the small state of CT when the same kids who begged you to take them on a holiday now squawk from the back seat, "Are we there yet?"
The people Israel have barely made it 40 minutes into a 40 year journey when they start asking about the same thing.

Now, if God Almighty, Creator of Heaven and Earth, had wanted to get them into the Promised Land any faster, the divine wisdom could've probably figured it out, don't you think?
Even with the transportation back then, it wasn't a forty year journey.
What took so long?

You know about the number "forty", right?
You know that in scripture, numbers generally convey more of a theological or spiritual meaning than numerical.
The number "forty", then, connotes a prolonged period of trial and testing, endurance and education.

At the beginning of his formal ministry, Jesus spends how many days in the wilderness being tempted by Satan? *Forty*.
Ever notice that we read the story of Jesus' temptation every year on the first Sunday in Lent? And Lent is how long?
Forty days – leading up to the ultimate liberation of life over death at Easter.

Same thing with the folks in the wilderness with Moses.

They “got moving” alright.

There was more going on than simply moving from Point A to Point B.

They were moving – not just to a new place, but a new identity.

From being Pharaoh’s slaves to God’s Beloved.

If God had just whooshed them in a spaceship into the Promised Land, they wouldn’t have had time to grow and change and heal.

Their feet might’ve been in the Promised Land,

but in their hearts they’d still be enslaved.

Look at the movement just in today’s passage.

They start out complaining and crying – literally, hangry – driving Moses beyond his wits end.

They may be tempted to give up on God, but God never gives up on them.

God gets them moving and keeps them moving . . .

to a place where God’s spirit rests upon them wherever they go.

“Get people moving.”

That’s what God did with the people in the wilderness.

That’s what happens when Jesus calls the disciples to follow him.

That’s why so many gospel stories (like today’s) take place as they travel to Jerusalem.

That’s why the earliest believers in the Book of Acts aren’t called Christians but people of The Way.

That’s why it’s called “The Way of Love”.

And in today’s Collect, that’s why we say we’re “running”

to obtain God’s promises.

Because the truth is, we ain’t gonna find ‘em by standing still.

Being stuck in the past.

We gotta get moving.

We are all on a spiritual journey.
And it's for each of us, by God's grace, to uphold one another
in taking responsibility for our spiritual growth.

I saw a fascinating article this week in the NYTimes
about archeologists finding ancient footprints in New Mexico
believed to push back the date that humans arrived in the Americas.
Using ground-penetrating radar, they identified human footprints,
made as people walked over damp, sandy ground on the margin of a lake
and then preserved under centuries of sediments.

One of these sets of footprints was of someone walking a straight line
for a mile and a half.

Another seemed to be a mother walking with a group of children
on a more meandering path.

"The children tend to be more energetic . . . jumping up and down,"
said one paleontologist.

I've had seasons in my life when I felt as if I were walking purposefully
in a straight line. (But frankly not as many as I'd like.)

More often it seems rather more meandering.

These days it often feels downright circuitous,
if not plain stuck sinking in the sand.

Maybe you're feeling it too.

Pray God that we keep moving. That we keep each other moving.

Looking and listening for signs of God beckoning us forward.

God cheering us on.

God in Christ walking beside us.

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