

*In the name of God Almighty the ground of our being,
the destination of our souls and the hope of the world. Amen.*

“Get people moving.”

That’s one of the key tenets of the Renewalworks program we’re doing this fall. It’s one of the reasons for taking the Spiritual Life Inventory, which – if you’ve not already done so – you have exactly one more week to take. They say that “engaging with scripture” is one of the best ways to “get people moving”. That knowing the stories of scripture helps us make sense of our own stories.

Take today’s first reading, from the Old Testament Book of Numbers (known in Hebrew as “In the Wilderness”).

The people, the ones complaining here, are actually the “chosen people” whom God has rescued from slavery in Egypt. They’ve experienced the glorious parting of the Red Sea. They’ve finally gotten what they’ve longed and prayed for.

But it turns out that moving from slavery to liberation brings its own challenges. They’re pining for the “good old days” of slavery back in Egypt.

Anyone who’s ever taken a family vacation with children knows a little something about this dynamic. You scarcely make it over the Connecticut border before the same kids who’ve begged you to take them on a holiday now squawk from the backseat, “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?

If you’ve “engaged” with scripture much at all, you may know that

numbers often convey theological meaning.
The number “40”, for example, connotes a prolonged period of trial and testing, endurance and education.

Jesus spends how many days in the wilderness at the beginning of his earthly ministry? *Forty*.
Ever notice that we read the story of Jesus’ temptation in the wilderness every year on the First Sunday in Lent?
And how long is Lent? *Forty days* – leading up to the ultimate liberation of life over death at Easter.

The folks there in the wilderness with Moses fit right into this pattern. 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. They were moving – from being Pharaoh’s slaves to God’s Beloved. They got moving, alright – on a journey of the spirit. A journey of a lifetime.

If God had whooshed them into the Promised Land in a spaceship, they wouldn’t have had time to grow and change. They wouldn’t have actually *moved* all that much. Their feet might be in the Promised Land, but in their hearts they’d still be slaves.

Look at the movement just in today’s passage. They start out complaining, craving and crying, driving Moses to his wits’ end, yet they hang together and God empowers them . . . not to a perfect place, but a better place. God brings them not to a resting place, but a place where God’s spirit may rest upon them wherever they go.

“Get people moving.”
That’s what God did with the people Israel.
That’s what happened when Jesus called the disciples to follow him.
That’s why so many of the gospel stories – like today’s – take place as they travel, often towards Jerusalem.
That’s why the folks of the early Church in the Book of Acts aren’t called Christians but people of The Way. *People on the move*.

“Get people moving.”

I like this notion.

It says it’s enough to start wherever we are.

It invites us to let down the heavy façade of perfection,
and let our rough edges show.

It promises that there’s always more.

No matter how old (or not) we are,
no matter how established (or not),
no matter what – there’s *more*.

More to learn, more to grow, more that God can do with us.

There’s a wonderful vignette in one of Renewalworks booklets we’re reading.

It’s about a woman in her 90s who lost her husband of more than sixty years.

Her priest visits.

Even in her deep mourning, she turns the priest and says,

“I’m trying to figure out what God is calling me to do and be
in this new chapter of my life.”

Ninety-something and broken-hearted,

God was not done with her.

She knew, God bless her, there was *more*.

One of the very best descriptions of the spiritual journey is in our Prayer Book.

It’s there in Eucharistic Prayer B, as we say

that in Jesus, God has “brought us out of error into truth,
out of sin into righteousness, out of death into life.”

Not a one of us here will reach the summit of this spiritual journey in this life,
and that’s ok.

The journey really is the destination.

And we’re here, by the grace of God, to cheer *and challenge* one another along the way.

So let’s get moving.

In the name of God Almighty, the ground of our being,
the destination of our souls and the hope of the world,
let’s get moving.

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