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Homily A6-2
Ex 19:2-8a, Ps 100, Rom 5:1-8, Matt 9:35-10:23

Resilient Grace

Lord, keep your Church steadfast in faith and love, that we may proclaim truth, and minister compassion. Amen.

We prayed these words the beginning of this service. Once in a while, the opening prayer really does a good job of summing up the essence of the scripture passages of the day, and that is certainly true today. From Moses and the Israelites, to Paul and the Romans, to Matthew and the Apostles: we have stories about people being set apart to form communities of faith and love. These turned out to be communities built for endurance; an endurance that was built on commitment and compassion.

But I don't think that when Paul and Matthew spoke about endurance that they meant stoic resolve! When Paul spoke about suffering, character, hope, faith, peace, grace and compassion, he was NOT speaking about STOICISM. He was speaking about something much more dynamic; he was speaking about RESILIENCE. The miracle of Mount Sinai not the result of Moses' stoicism. The miracle of Mount Sinai may be found somewhere between the grace of God, and the resilience of refugees wandering in the desert. They had risked everything to get away from oppression, but were not at all sure where this was leading them: it turns out that liberation did not come with a road map.

Paul spends some time teaching the Romans about spiritual growth, especially about the roots of spiritual resilience. Matthew moves us briskly through the commissioning of the apostles (a word which simply means those who are sent out with a purpose). As Jesus sends out his disciples to proclaim the Good News and to heal the suffering, he also reminds them that in our world, truth and compassion can be very costly.

So what are we to do in the face of all of this? What is at the heart of Christian resilience? If we are not simply stoics, if this is NOT about keeping a stiff upper lip, what will keep us going? The clues are in today's scriptures. The disciples Jesus sends out, the believers Paul encourages, the desert refugees liberated by Moses, **ALL** have one thing in common: a mission, a purpose, and a future!

Now, you may say, that's all well and good, but **endurance** still sounds like a stoic virtue to me! A character trait of flinty pilgrims or steely staff sergeants. But certainly, we know the worst thing one should do in life is to keep doing the same thing while expecting different results – a familiar definition of insanity! No: That could NOT be what Paul or Matthew meant by endurance. All the disappointments, all the deaths, both literal and figurative, that we endure as we travel through life without a map, all of it comes with considerable grief. Somehow, I think, endurance must be spiritually akin to grief work, that process of embracing and letting go, moving on while remembering. Certainly that is the thrust of the New Testament: moving on while remembering. I am reminded of a poem by Gwen Flowers, who wrote:

I had my own notion of grief,
I thought it was the sad time
That followed the death of
Someone you love.
And you had to push through it
To get to the other side.
But I'm learning there is no other side.
There is no pushing through.
But rather,
There is absorption.
Adjustment.
Acceptance.

And grief is not something you complete,
But rather, you endure.

Grief is not a task to finish
And move on,
But an element of yourself-
An alteration of your being.
A new way of seeing.
A new definition of self.

An alteration of being – a new way of seeing – a new definition of self. Neither Moses, Paul, nor Jesus were models of stoic endurance. No: They were models of dynamic resilience. And in their lives, Moses, Paul, and Jesus knew a lot of grief. They didn't just slog through the present, or cling to the past. While on the surface they may have seemed steady, or resistant in the face of attacks on truth and subversions of justice, they taught us that underneath a faithful purpose and mission, a new self can sprout up through the ground of your being. Grief can turn up the soil and planted new seeds for the future.

The present struggle can be pregnant with the seeds of life, love, and justice. They may be unforeseen, or even unconscious, but these seeds are present whenever we embrace the PURPOSES God has for us, the MISSION Jesus gave us, and the GIFTS the Spirit bestows upon us. In all of this, remember Paul's words: *We have peace with God through our Lord Jesus ... through whom we have ... grace ... and hope.*
(Romans 5)