

“The Bible: The Journey of Faith”
Exodus 15:1-3

One of the questions that is on our minds and hearts right now as a nation is this: How do we find our way through the mess we find ourselves in? We are living through the mess of a pandemic that has gripped our world. Even with the vaccine, we are realizing that it will take us several months before we see major improvements. And then the political unrest we are facing seems to bring on more violence and pain to our world. We never imagined in our wildest nightmares such scenes from the invasion of Capitol Hill. People are divided based on what they choose to believe as facts. With a multitude of internet sources, there seems to be an endless stream of conspiracy theories that appeal to our instincts of fear. The world as we know it seems to be falling apart. What is the thread that we can hold onto during this challenging time?

Three examples of faith came to my mind for how people find their way through tough hardships. When the road ahead seemed impossible, they dared to take the next step and to trust because they had held firmly that thread of God’s love. First: Harriet Tubman. One of the key pieces to her ability to escape slavery was her faith in God to help her find her way. According to Wikipedia, “Harriet Tubman was an American abolitionist and political activist. Born into slavery, Tubman escaped and subsequently made some 13 missions to rescue approximately 70 enslaved people, including family and friends, using the network of antislavery activists and safe houses known as the Underground Railroad.” Her faith was the key to her ability to stay fearless and focused on love. Here is one of her famous quotes, “It wasn’t me, it was the Lord! I always told Him, ‘I trust to you. I don’t know where to go or what to do, but I expect You to lead me,’ and He always did.”

The second example is from the late senator John McCain who, “spoke about how prayer got him through imprisonment in Vietnam. As a kid, he had gone to Episcopal High School in Alexandria, Virginia. The priests led the kids through morning prayers every single day. He said the prayer then because he had to. And yet, when he was stuck in that cell, staring at four walls, with no way of knowing what misery the days and weeks and months ahead held, he started every day with prayer. It kept him going.” (Michael Curry, in *Love is the Way*)

The third example is from the Bible. It is found in the book of Exodus and the journey of ancient Israel from slavery into freedom. One of the great themes in the Bible is that of a journey. The journey is both inward and outward toward liberation, love, and grace. The people of God are shaped by the journey. They had endured 400 years of slavery in Egypt. They were living as exploited people with no hope or prospect for anything else. Then God called one person who listened and followed on faith. Moses believed the impossible. The odds against him and his people seemed insurmountable. How do you get slaves liberated from enslavement without an army? It seemed impossible. Yet, Moses kept taking the next step and the next step until the liberation became a reality. And in today’s scripture we hear the song of joy that came from the people’s deep faith.

We don’t know exactly how many years it took to get to this point, but we know that this was an incredible journey of trust in the face of great fear. With each challenge and obstacle, Moses and the people had to listen, trust, and to see life through God’s way. But the story did not end there. They did not live happily ever after. The same pattern of liberation and trust had to be repeated over and over again. After experiencing the great liberation, they doubted and grumbled. They

listened to their own wisdom and tried to find security in their own devices. The pattern of three steps forward and two steps back was repeated over and over again. The same was true of the followers of Jesus. And every time, the journey had to be the key. Whether the threat was internal or external, the journey was the key. Every misstep or trial had to be faced with faith and reliance on God's guidance to stay on the path of love.

We know from our own personal experiences how difficult it is to stay on the path of love because we often lose sight of the thread that runs through all of our lives. So many illusions and fears mislead us to believe that there is another way. And no amount of information or facts can really help us truly be transformed on the path of love. We often try to rationalize our way out of a challenge forgetting the power of our spirits. In the last few months, we have seen how hard it is to believe the facts once we have made up our minds. That is why a journey is often necessary. Conversion does not happen if we have all of our securities and certainties. We have to let go and trust every step of the way. Staying on the path of love requires a continuous commitment to the process of transformation into greater love. And the good news of our time is that we are literally on a journey where the path ahead is not clear which presents us with an opportunity for greater trust. We can try to cling onto what we know and resort to strategies of fear and control, or we can trust God by doing the next loving thing.

We may feel that the brokenness of this current moment is beyond repair, but through faith, we know that the God of the Exodus and of the resurrection takes what seems impossible and makes it possible. Our work is to trust love. If your response is that of anger, hate, fear, or certainty that you are right, then you are in the two steps backward time of the journey. If your response is to work for healing, justice, and peace, God will show you the way forward which always involves leaning on God's presence. Richard Rohr writes, "We want certitude, but instead God asks us to have faith."

You can use this story from Exodus as a mirror to your own journey of faith. Imagine yourself on the journey of faith toward freedom (inwardly for you and outwardly for our community and world). Where are you? Are you still in Egypt in slavery? Are you waiting for Exodus? Are you rejoicing about freedom? Are you wandering in the wilderness weary and full of doubt? Have you lost all of your securities in the wilderness? Do you want to rush out of that desert place? Are you in the land of promise? Wherever you are, let the Holy One bless you and give you the assurance that even when you lose your way, God will never abandon you.

We will end with a Lectio Divina of our Bible verse for this week. I will read the text three times. The first time, you are invited to listen to a word or a phrase that shimmers for you. The second time, you are invited to pay attention to your feelings around your word or phrase. The third time, the invitation is to listen to a message from God for you right now. I will give you some silence between each of the readings.

Lectio Divina Isaiah 43:2

"When you pass through the waters, I will be with you;
and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you;
when you walk through fire you shall not be burned,
and the flame shall not consume you."

Amen.