

October 25, 2020

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O God our strength and our Redeemer. Amen.

Good morning! I am happy to be with you this morning, and I am grateful to Kristin and the whole community of St. James' for welcoming me into this holy place.

Eight years ago, during a job interview for a position as parish administrator, the interviewer and I were talking about pastoral care: mostly about the need for a steady presence, and a lot of discretion. The interviewer said, "most times, you won't get to know the end of the story ... are you o.k. with that?"

Coming from a Department of Defense, "need to know" background, I didn't give it a second thought, and said, "absolutely!" (side bar – I got the job! 😊)

Well, as I read the Hebrew scripture passage assigned for this morning, I did give it a second thought: I realized that we love knowing "the end of the story." We love completion. We love projects, situations, and stories that can be neatly tied up with a bow and presented as **DONE**.

Completion. Culturally, we're conditioned to need it. Cross that finish line! Complete that project. Finish that book. Here's a phrase often meant to strike fear into the hearts of those it's said to: "we have unfinished business!" We like to "tie up loose ends."

Completion is why I love tasks like washing dishes, cooking, and crocheting. While these tasks may seem, at times, never-ending, they do have a beginning and an end. There is a tangible result – clean counters, a tasty meal, a new afghan on the sofa.

Completion. We can feel unfulfilled if we don't get it.

This morning, we hear the end of the story of Moses. Moses, "whom the Lord knew face to face." The Lord let Moses see the promised land. The promise that started with God's call to Moses to "bring my people out of Egypt ... to a land flowing with milk and honey." A task that Moses worked on for FORTY YEARS. A job that, at times, must have seemed endless, and somewhat like trying to nail Jell-O to a tree.

Scholars debate when it was that Moses found out he wasn't going to make it to Canaan. Some say two years into the wilderness trek, some say just shy of the border of the promised land. Whenever it was, the point is that Moses knew he wasn't going to finish the trip.

I've read a number of commentaries that articulate what I had felt for a long time when reading this passage – bummer for Moses! Jeepers, God, couldn't you let it go just this once? I mean, it's so close Moses can SEE it. It's right there, just let him get there!

Nope.

So, what's the point? Are we to look at God as a mean parent, following through on a stated punishment? Is the point that God keeps God's promises, whether the promise seems fair or not? I don't think so.

Moses knew he wasn't going to finish the job he had set out to do. And Moses kept doing it anyway. When the task seemed endless, when the whining overwhelmed him, when it all seemed too much, too big, when the fights seemed too petty, and the trek was SO ... DARNED ... LONG, Moses kept going. And when it was time, Moses handed off his unfinished business to someone else.

Yeah, well, you might say, that was MOSES. Moses, who knew the Lord face to face. Moses, who got to see God's back; who spoke to God in the burning bush, who debated the merits of his speaking ability WITH GOD. I, too, stand in awe of Moses and his accomplishments, and I say, "nope ... I'm no Moses!"

What I've discovered is ... just when I'm comfortable with what I believe in, for example, really settling in to the idea that I can try as I might to emulate Moses, or Miriam, or, or, or, or and it doesn't matter because I can't, so I won't bother, here's what happens: I experience a 2 x 4 moment. I hear something, or speak with someone, or read something that smacks me upside the head like a 2 x 4. I can't ignore it.

My 2 x 4 moment on this topic came a few weeks ago. I can't remember where I came across this; it was probably on Facebook. The XIV Dalai Lama said, "*To remain indifferent to the challenges we face is indefensible. If the goal is noble, whether or not it is realized within our lifetime is largely irrelevant. What we must do, therefore, is to strive and persevere and never give up.*"

Well, there it is. Something Moses knew. And St. Paul. And Martin Luther King, Jr., and John Lewis, and Mother Teresa, and Oscar Romero, and Rosa Parks, and Jonathan Daniels, and Alice Bassett-Jellema.

And something Jesus knew. In today's Gospel, Jesus answers the "what is the greatest commandment" question...AND...the "why should we even try" question. We heard the answer ... the answer is love. Love God, love neighbor, love self. With your whole heart, mind, and strength.

Bishop Michael Curry says, “This love isn’t a feeling; it is a choice. And it’s one we make over and over, every day of our lives.”

This love got Moses through the wilderness, even though he KNEW he wasn’t going to reach the promised land. This love can get us through each day, minute by minute, if necessary. This love guides us as we choose those goals that may remain unfinished in our lifetimes. This love is NEVER finished.

So find your “unfinished business.” Never give up on your noble goal. Keep doing. Keep striving. Keep choosing to love. Keep loving with our WHOLE heart, knowing that God has promised to love us and be with us every step of the way.

Amen.