

Hope Amidst Difficulty

Is. 43:1-7,15,19/ Ps. 134:1-14/ Luke 10:25-37

Ginetta Sagan was involved in the resistance against the fascist government in Italy during WWII. During the war she was put in prison and suffered greatly there. In the words of a close friend Aher spirits were devastated. She thought, "Did any of her friends know where she was? Would she ever see them again?" However, one night, when she was thinking this, suddenly, her friend writes, "The door to her dark room was flung open, and a bread roll was thrown in. It was the same kind you see all over Italy today, baked with a sort of cavity in the center of it." (I actually don't know about this kind of bread, but maybe some of you all do). Anyway, when Ginetta tore open the roll to eat it, she discovered a matchbox, and inside the matchbox was a piece of paper with a single word written on it: "Coraggio" -- Italian for courage. And she said her despair was lifted in that moment, for she was not alone. She she had the strength and courage to go on.

In our first reading from Isaiah 43 this morning we hear, "Do not fear, I have redeemed you/I have called you by name/I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert/"

A way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert. I know that some of us feel pretty good right now -- it's a beautiful day -- but there are times when some of us may feel LOST IN THE WILDERNESS or THIRSTY IN QUITE A LARGE DESERT! Isaiah the prophet tells us God's message: Don't be afraid -- I will make a way for you through the wilderness!"

How does God do that for us though? As a Christian, I find that way through Jesus -- but how does God/ how does Jesu help us when we feel like we're facing a large wilderness, or a wide desert?

How does Jesus reach into our darkest times and give us the courage that Ginetta Sagan received in that prison that day, on a piece of paper, in a matchbox?

Well, for starters, in my life I have found a way through the wilderness in learning that, just like Ginetta Sagan, I am not alone. Through other people in my life, through prayer, through other people or events like today's walk, Jesus has slipped me slips of paper at some of the tough times in my life that said "courage" -- which gave me strength and courage, and helped me know that I was not alone, that God is always with me.

The following story tells about a way that God has shown me a way through the wilderness.

Once there was a country ruled by a king. The country was invaded and the king was killed, but his children were rescued by servants and hidden away. The smallest, an infant daughter, was reared by a peasant family. They didn't know she was the king's daughter. She had become the peasant's daughter and she dug potatoes and lived in poverty.

One day an old woman came out of the forest and approached her: "Do you know who you are?" And the young woman said, "Yes, I'm the farmer's daughter and a potato digger." The old woman said, "No, no, you are the daughter of the king." And the potato digger said, "I'm the daughter of the king?" And the old woman said, "Yes, that's who you are!" And the old woman disappeared back into the forest.

After the old woman left, the young woman still dug potatoes but she dug them differently. It was the way she held her shoulders and the light in her eyes because she knew who she was. She knew she was the daughter of the king.

In my life God has shown me a way through the wilderness in hearing the truth of God's love for all of us in my church, in scripture, and in gathering together with other believers in prayer, through beloved

friends God has reminded me that I am made in God's image and that I am "called by name," as Isaiah 43 said this morning, and deeply loved.

But that is not always an easy thing to remember! Sometimes in my life I don't see those messages that Jesus wants to give me because of different reasons -- maybe I am angry or hurt. Sometimes Jesus puts a scrap of paper in the middle of his bread, but I won't open the loaf to know that we was with me.

Sometimes we may be angry over a loss. We may feel that what we or others have faced is NOT fair! And we may feel far away from God!!! But really, God is very near to us always -- God may laugh with us or weep with us, but God is ALWAYS with us -- loving us, and challenging us to love others as God loves us.

So we hang in there -- and we hang onto words like Isaiah's -- "Do not fear -- I have called you by name, and I WILL MAKE a way for YOU!!"

Sometimes we forget that God is with us and we forget the story of God's love for us because we think that God CAUSED sickness or tragedy to come into the lives of people we love, or ourselves; but God doesn't make tragedies happen -- they just happen! and it is good to just remember that God is with us in our tough times.

So we hang in there and hang onto the belief that God is with us and loves us and God has made us in his own image/and called us good -- even while we need to turn, daily, to the Lord to ask for healing and forgiveness in our lives.

And we listen again to what Is. 43 said to us today, "do not fear, I will make a way for you in the wilderness," and we muster up all the strength and courage we have to live our lives.

We muster up all the courage and strength we can receive from the Lord to take the risk of loving another person! and the risk of believing in ourselves and believing that we can accomplish great things!

So we face each day, and we do our best, with God=s help, one day at a time.

*And we may fall back now and then -- but we keep going back to the love of our God who comes to us in so many ways. Over and over and over and maybe on the 1,000,000th time God says *Al* am with you and I love you@ and we really HEAR it! And we find our way through the wilderness that had seemed so impossible to cross when we had first faced it.*

So we face each day with God=s poetry being spoken in our ear, and we do our best, with God=s help, one day at a time.

And over our lives, if we keep hanging in there with God, we GROW from the tough times, with God's grace, into people who know what is important in life -- into people who know that what is important is LOVE -- not things or possessions, or what other people think -- AND that God can help us become that kind of person while we=re crossing the wilderness.

God can make us grow from our tough times! Slowly, slowly, slowly.

So that a river can grow in the deserts of our hearts -- even if it begins with a tiny drop of water, as small as a tear.

And a way can be made through the wilderness of our future beginning with a single step.

Of course some of us see a great wilderness ahead of us -- but let us remember that we are not alone! And God has given us gifts and grace to journey with God. Our walk today is part of that journey. Let us continue to make our way through the wilderness to the promised land, today!