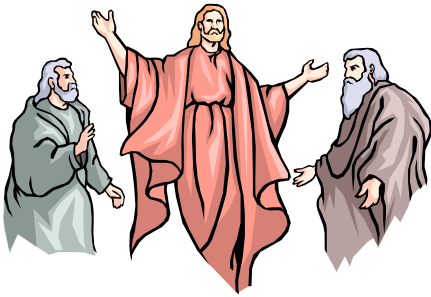


The End Result February 24, 2008

Exodus 17:1-7; Romans 5:1-11; John 4:5-42; Psalm 95 2-24-08



As most of us go through life, we have some kind of plan in mind. Some have plans that are very specific and that they will follow to the letter. Others of us live far less structured lives. We live in a blueprint that allows for deviations and alterations. Both methods work well in guiding us from one point to another. Using them we plan for the future determining where we would like to be five years from one point or another. As we grow older, we estimate when it is we will retire, try to determine where and hope we will have the days and nights to accomplish the end result we desire.

Having a plan for life means that we live in process. While things may be planned, nothing is ever static. We grow and change as new opportunities and people present themselves to us.

Everyone in our scripture readings was in process. The Nation Israel whining its way through the desert was moving toward the promised land—journeying in stages, not only in a physical sense, but also in a psychological sense. We are told they spent 40 years in the desert. Moses must have suffered a great deal as he tried to lead God’s chosen people into a new world and a new way of life. They were never happy with him or with the God who had freed them from Egypt. While we might think their faith in God would grow as their Maker supplied them with the essentials of life, it didn’t. They didn’t much care about the end result, only that they find some comfort and ease in the present moment.

Not only was the Samaritan woman at the well in the process of growing when she recognized Jesus as the Messiah, so was Jesus and so were his disciples.

The Jews and Samaritans did not get along at all. So, Jesus speaking to her as a Samaritan was a huge step. Jesus speaking to her as a woman was another. This is what astonished his disciples he had spoken to a woman. Small cracks in his narrow mission to the Jews were beginning to open as the good news of the gospel was shared more broadly. The original plan needed some alterations if the message was to be spread into all the world. Those alterations took place gradually as the base of Christianity was laid and was extended.

In Paul’s Letter to the Romans personal and communal growth was stressed. This letter is Paul’s theological treatise. He formed his concept of who Jesus was from things he had heard about him, he never had firsthand knowledge and did not have the gospels to read and consider. His letters were the first written parts of the New Testament. They were circulated among the churches and were widely read. Romans is particularly meaty. The reading for today is encouraging and hopeful.

In it Paul writes of the progress that small community of faith had made. He noted that they had been reconciled to God and that God truly loved them. Through their knowledge and acceptance of Jesus, they had attained grace.

The most hopeful statement, for me, has always been, that through the trials of life we learn to endure and we develop strong character and we come to hope. Very often, when we are traveling through a difficult time we cannot see that our character is being built and that we will come around to having hope. But, we do. I have had friends, and you have, too, who have encountered extended times of pain and challenge they think they cannot endure. They learn if they choose to face each day, one at a time, they can make it. I admire them. I am sure they do not believe when they are suffering that the end result will be hope. But it is. Because, you see, when we make it through a difficult time we begin to understand just what it is we are made of and we know that we can survive another encounter of the same kind or of another variety. We develop the tools to work through whatever may come our way. We become survivors hanging on by our fingertips until we are able to live life fully once again; until we have the hope that God is on our side. We lose sight of this when we traverse valleys of shadow and fear. We forget that each new day dawns bright with promise.

Kalidasa wrote:

*Listen to the Exhortation of the Dawn!
Look to this Day!
For it is Life, the very Life of Life.
In its brief course lie all the
Verities and Realities of your Existence.
The Bliss of Growth,
The Glory of Action,
The Splendor of Beauty;
For Yesterday is but a Dream,
And To-morrow is only a Vision;
But To-day well lived makes
Every Yesterday a Dream of Happiness,
And every Tomorrow a Vision of Hope.
Look well therefore to this Day!
Such is the Salutation of the Dawn!*

He is saying that through all of our yesterdays and tomorrows, this day exists as a time of hope. No matter what difficult realities we might face we are engaged in a process that will help us grow and develop our character and our strength and which will bring us to the end result we are seeking.

In a different way, he is writing of the same thing Paul wrote. We grow in character and strength to a new day in life. We need to honor that strength as we see to continue moving forward in serving our God. Amen

Kalidasa is a renowned Sanskrit poet and dramatist.