

Ascension Denver
Institution of Weezie Blanchard
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For some reason, I remember it was 9 PM. The moving van was set to appear early the next morning for our cross country journey to Colorado. We had been working for weeks, organizing possessions into boxes labeled by both room and contents. We had a notebook with lines corresponding to each box. We were prepared.

So, how was it that the house looked so chaotic? How was there still so much stuff unpacked—those little last minute things that seem to multiply? And where had all the dust and dirt come from?

Our sons George and John were 3 and 7, and the present chaos was more than they could take. They were crying, and arguing...at the same time. I put down the broom and said to Nate, "I can't do this. I've had it."

In that moment, all the layers of the move had crowded in on me—leaving my dying father, moving to a place where I knew no one. Having no assurance that either Nate or I would find employment. All for a school for the boys. At that moment, it seemed absurd.

And I had nothing left to give. I was done. I didn't care, right then, if we made it into our two station wagons the next morning or not. I could have cared less if we were ready for the movers. I was absolutely, simply done.

Just before the portion of Numbers we heard this evening, Moses and God had a quarrel. Moses said to God, "Why are you treating me this way? What did I

ever do to you to deserve this? Did I conceive them? Was I their mother? So why dump the responsibility of this people on me? Why tell me to carry them around like a nursing mother, carry them all the way to the land you promised to their ancestors?... I can't do this by myself—it's too much, all these people. If this is how you intend to treat me, do me a favor and kill me. I've seen enough; I've had enough. Let me out of here.”

Moses was done. On the night before we set out for Colorado, I assure you, I could relate. There comes a time—actually, there come many times—when we are simply done. We have to get out of the house, stop the car, leave the party, hang up the phone. We are done. We've absolutely had enough.

It's called life.

The Exodus is the tale of the human journey through life. The journey from our bondage to sin—through a passageway—to a land where the honey flows.

But that passageway from bondage to freedom is, at times, more than we can bear. It is no trip to the slopes or the beach. It is, rather, an odyssey, filled with unimaginable wonders and unspeakable losses. And requiring of us a stamina in the midst of arduous days and nights when we seem painfully alone. Requiring us to keep on when we think that we are done.

Well, thanks, Ruth. Glad we invited you here for this joyful evening!

Here's the thing. You, my beloved sisters and brothers, you know this journey. I know you do. Because I had the gift of walking alongside you not so long ago, when the way seemed unclear, when the burden seemed too great.

And in the midst of those difficult days, I imagine some of you may have wondered if it was worth all the effort. I mean, you each have burdens enough to carry of your own, in your own lives. So, I could understand if you asked yourself, “why stay?”

The Israelites had a similar frustration. Why are we out here, in this wilderness? Where is the land you promised to us? Were things not better in Egypt? At least there we knew what we would eat and how we would bathe.

Should not life in God’s beloved community be the one place devoid of the troubles of this world? Why do we stay at this thing we call Church in the midst of a journey that at times is so arduous?

We stay because of where we are bound. There is a place, as Carole King once sang, way over yonder where the honey runs in rivers each day. We are a people bound for the Promised Land. We are on a journey of God’s own making.

In our gospel reading, Jesus prepares his friends to stay on this journey without him by their side. The word he uses to describe what they will need to do is a very specific one in the Greek language—*meno*. We translate it as “abide.”

It’s what God wanted from the Israelites in the wilderness. It’s what the disciples would need to do over and over for the rest of their lives. This word, *meno*, means much more than just stay here awhile. The sense of it, rather, is to dwell with someone even and especially when the going gets rough.

Some say it’s like the place a mother gives a babe from the moment that child is in the womb. A dwelling place—beyond every fear, every frustration, every grief. It’s the stuff of lullabies. It’s what God wanted Moses to give the people. I

think Moses knew it—which is precisely why he used the image of a mother nursing babes to rail at God—am I their mother? In a very real way, the truest answer was yes. *Yes, Moses. You are.*

The group Sweet Honey in the Rock has a song some of you may know: *The clock on the wall says its time to go. Still, my heart really wants you to stay. Stay a while with me. Stay a little bit longer, stay a little bit longer. Stay a little bit longer with me.*

To me, the song speaks of *meno*—this yearning we have to abide in love.

Beloved Community is not now nor has it ever been about escape. It is, rather, the community with whom we are bound to Jordan. This, my friends, is the community with whom we journey, all our lives, to the Promised Land.

We are bound for a land where every creature God has made will run free. A land where every nation will live in harmony and peace. A land where children's bellies will be filled with good food not distended in hunger, where babies will be strong, not ravaged by disease, and where every person will stand tall, not fearing any oppressors.

We are traveling companions.

This journey is our destiny. And in each new season, God raises up servants to help guide us through the next passageway. Weezie, you are that servant for this people for this season. This is God's joyful surprise for you. You bring gifts that are needed now; you bring limitations that will call for the strength of others. You bring longings that will meet the deep desires already in this place. You bring wisdom that will open new possibilities. You are not here by accident.

And, yet, the journey is not and cannot be yours alone.

When Moses was done, God responded by spreading out the anointing among seventy leaders. To share the weight of responsibility with Moses. We have each other so that we can stay when everything in us wants to quit.

On the night before we moved, at the second I put my broom down in desperation, friends appeared. One whisked the boys and me away for a ride to get a treat. Others stayed to help Nate pack up the remaining items and clean the house for the next occupants. And somehow, by the grace of God, I made it. Past my desperation, past my fears. I made it into the future.

The seventy surround us at every juncture on the journey. The Spirit is spread; the load is shared. The journey continues.

And we are able, because of our beloved community, to stay, to abide. And this is how we get to the promised land. Not by bearing the load alone. Nor by throwing down our brooms for good, just on the edge of an adventure.

No.

We get there by spreading the load and staying a little bit longer than we think we can. Because just around the corner, love is waiting for us.

A few weeks ago, I watched a movie called **Life Itself**. It tells the story of two families whose lives were inexplicably bound on their respective journeys to the promised land. As the matriarch of one of the families lies dying, she says to her beloved child, "Life brings you to your knees. It brings you lower than you think

you can go. But if you get back up and move forward, if you go just a little farther, you will always find love.”

I believe this is what it means to abide. To get back up, together, when we imagine we cannot, and go a little farther.

For if we do, we will always find love.

This, my friends, is what you have done. You have gotten back up and kept going. In a word, you have abided. And now, together with your new priest, Weezie, may you find love. And may you be strong and brave and true on the journey to the land where the honey runs in rivers each day. For that is where we are bound.