

I'm German.

Three generations back all of my relative
Were born there-
And both of my grandmothers were immigrant brides.

I have her first needlepoint her with me-
The petite stitching quite a contrast to her actual pioneer life.

I often wonder what Frieda Mueller must've felt
When she arrived in the port of Galveston
And made her way north
through the wilds of Texas to settle
In the wild scrappy dry Texas hill country
So different than her homeland.

I admire her strength
Her perseverance,
Her sense of adventure.

Being German
Meant for her
As it means for me,
That
As long as I keep an eye
toward a goal,
I can at least chart
and stay on a course.

She sure did.
From her comfy home in Germany
She travelled many thousands of miles
To establish a new life in the wild, wild Lone Star state of Texas.

But what happens when we lose our sense of direction?

Have you ever ended up
Not knowing where you were headed,
And going around in circles,
frustrated and tired,
Bewildered and angry,
seemingly right at the place you started?

We are not alone in that.

In psalm 137 we hear the Israelites immigrant refugees moan-
They longed for the old country,
Their chosen land,
The holy land.

They feared the new.

We hear the frustration of the Babylonian exiles-

They had lost their homeland.
Their very voices were silenced.

They lost their ability to sing,
And in the last part of psalm-
Verses 7-9

Which were wisely left out of our psalm recitation this morning-
We hear some shocking anger language-

⁷ Remember, O Lord, against the Edomites
the day of Jerusalem's fall,

how they said, "Tear it down! Tear it down!
Down to its foundations!"

⁸ O daughter Babylon, you devastator!^[b]

Happy shall they be who pay you back
what you have done to us!

⁹ Happy shall they be who take your little ones
and dash them against the rock!

The deeply felt emotion of anger is understandable.
The language is deeply disturbing.

Such was life for the Israelites
who had experienced the Babylonian Exile
in 587 B.C.E.

Like many refugees,
the places they had been forced to go
and the lives they had been subjected to living
had made them rudderless,
gun-shy and more than a little afraid.

But like many modern day refugees
a word from God came to them
in the form of our Old Testament reading,
Isaiah Chapter 40.

In essence, God says,
"Don't look at where you are
or what you have,
Or what you've lost.

Remember Whose you are."

How do we mount up on wings like Eagles
And soar above our problems?
How do we run life's race and not get weary?
How do we walk the way of Jesus and not faint?

How do we become spiritual athletes?
God's equivalent of Super Bowl players?

The answer is deceptively simple.

We don't need a whole bunch of spiritual aerobics classes
Or the Christian version of a crash diet.
There is no simple formula for spiritual fitness,

Although sometimes we think that-
If we only knew more,
Did more,
Did better,
Screwed up less,
Then it all would be ok.

That type of thinking is kind of
like those 30 minute fitness infomercials
With their exercise machines,
And special fad diets
And expensive meal plans.

They may give you a sense of purpose temporarily ,
A feeling of Accomplishment,
Of doing something,
But they rarely produce the intended result.

The raw truth is-
In order to be spiritually fit-
We just need to let go and let God.

That is the pilgrimage journey of the immigrant
The refugees,
The journey of Jesus
And we who follow Jesus' ways.

We need to hear that reassuring voice
over and over again in our lives.
We need to trust that God is at work
so that we can continue,
as Isaiah proclaims,
to rise up on eagles' wings
and literally soar above
the problems and issues that plague us.

Never has this been more true for the St. John's Community than today.

No one here was more disappointed at the communication
From the Episcopal Church in Minnesota this past week
Than I was.

I am angry.
I am disappointed.

I am frustrated.
Like the Babylonian exiles I don't see a way forward.

It hurts my German soul
Not to have a clear pathway,
And I plan to get there.

Oh does that ever hurt.

But join me in trusting
That God will see us through.

God will see us through.

The former rector of Gethsemane Church
Sandy Wilson,
Faced similarly tough times.

I like what she said:
If God brings you to it,
God will bring you through it.

If God brings us to it,
God will bring us through it

Only in this way
Will we find our spiritual fitness.
We will run and not get weary,
with souls made young by the Soul-Shaper God.
We will walk the way of Jesus
And not faint.

This is the tender toughness,
the inner resiliency,
the new life that God gives
To those who trust. Amen.