

Luke 8:15 (NKJV)

But the ones that fell on the good ground are those who, having heard the word with a noble and good heart, keep it and bear fruit with patience.

During these three weeks of Pre Lent what the readings and the prayers are emphasizing are the Christian Virtues. This is done to prepare ourselves for the penitential season of Lent for the reason that virtue is the gate to Christian living. Virtue is the door that opens the gate to our life journey with God.

Last week the stress was on Temperance, how all of God’s creation is good in moderation and how we should train ourselves much like an athlete to hike this journey with God.

This week we are going to talk about fortitude or as my little old Cherokee grandmother would have put it, “grit.”

All you have to do is read today’s Epistle with Paul’s litany of all that he had gone through for the sake of the Kingdom to get a pretty good idea what fortitude means.

2 Corinthians 11:24-28 (KJV) *Of the Jews five times received I forty stripes save one.*

Thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day I have been in the deep; In journeyings often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils by mine own countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; In weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness. Beside those things that are without, that which cometh upon me daily, the care of all the churches.

That, my brothers and sisters, is fortitude, that is grit.

And we sometimes complain because we have to come to church in the rain.

What is it that people will drive forty miles to go to work but can't cross the railroad track to come to church?

You know what I mean.

Fortitude. John Locke once wrote, "Fortitude is the guard and support of the other virtues." While Francis Bacon said, "Fortitude is the marshal of thought, the armor of the will, and the fort of reason."

Fortitude, Fortitude is the strength to do what is right in the sight of God no matter what, no matter what are the circumstances, no matter what are the consequences.

Fortitude is oneself having enough evidence to be convicted of being a Christian.

Fortitude, Fortitude is Paul clinging to a piece of driftwood in a stormy sea. Fortitude is oneself clinging to the faith in the stormy sea of today's world.

Fortitude is that faith that God will keep us even in those times when we find ourselves in our darkest moments, when we are so far down in the valley, that valley that the Psalmist describes as "the valley of death" that we cannot even feel the presence of God, that we still have the faith He is still there with us.

There are times where we are like any one of the seeds that are described in today's Gospel. At any given time we can be on the hard ground of the path, among the weeds, in the shallow dirt or in the good ground. It is when we find ourselves in anywhere but in the good ground that we need to persevere, to have the fortitude to persevere, to ask for God's pardon and for His Mercy and then climb back on to the path and go ahead.

We cannot wallow in self-pity. We cannot continue to waffle about. God calls us to Him. God calls us to Him and it is our task in life to answer that call, to make that journey.

We are not perfect creatures but God knows that but He expects us to keep on keeping on.

2 Corinthians 4:7-9 (NKJV) *But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellence of the power may be of God and not of us. We are hard-pressed on every side, yet not crushed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed—*

Last week we heard that we must be temperate, to train our selves like athletes to make that journey, to run the race, as Paul calls it. This week we hear that we must finish the race, to have the fortitude to continue on against all odds.

In order to have fortitude we must have faith.

Again, turning to Paul's letter **2 Corinthians 4:13-16 (NKJV)** *And since we have the same spirit of faith, according to what is written, "I believed and therefore I spoke," we also believe and therefore speak, knowing that He who raised up the Lord Jesus will also raise us up with Jesus, and will present us with you. For all things are for your sakes, that grace, having spread through the many, may cause thanksgiving to abound to the glory of God. Therefore we do not lose heart. Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day.*

Keep the faith. Have fortitude.

Amen.