



September 23, 2020

RESILIENT FAITH

About six centuries before the birth of Jesus, the Hebrew people suffered the devastation of a foreign army that destroyed Jerusalem and tore down the Temple. Many of the Hebrews were marched into exile in Babylon, and the rest scattered to find safety. It was a terrible loss that irrevocably changed their world.

And in the midst of loss, they found that their faith was resilient and strong. When they could no longer go to the Temple together, the rituals of faith grew stronger at home. Observing the Sabbath became more central as a weekly devotion, one that keeps people grounded in faithfulness to this day. Before, they had connected with God in the land they called home. After, they learned to connect with God wherever they were living. They discovered the resilience of faith.

A resilient faith does not magically make everything better. The exile was a terrible and mournful experience. But in the midst of it, God gave them new gifts of spiritual connection and new ways of being secure in God's presence.

In a way, the entire history of the Bible can be seen as a question of whether God's presence will still bless our lives after everything else has changed.

- Adam and Eve knew God's presence in the garden, but would God still be there when they left the innocence of Eden?
- Jacob's children knew God's presence within their large family, but would God's providence still be with Joseph after he was sold into slavery and taken to Egypt?
- The people of Israel knew God's presence in the Temple, but would God still bless them in exile?

Every time, the answer was, "Yes." After the cataclysmic change, God is there on the other side of the boundary. And now, *we* are living in the midst of change and loss, and missing our old ways of knowing God's presence. The gifts of God will be found in different ways, so let's look together, and share our discoveries.

After the exile in Babylon, the Hebrew people went back to Jerusalem and built a new Temple. They returned with a more resilient faith, newly aware of the strength and breadth of God's presence.

Peace,

Rev. Dr. Matthew Wooster
Senior Minister