



Grace Covenant Presbyterian Church

February 12, 2023

“This is the place”

Deuteronomy 30:15-20

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See, I have set before you today life and prosperity, death and adversity.

If you obey the commandments of the LORD your God that I am commanding you today, by loving the LORD your God, walking in his ways, and observing his commandments, decrees, and ordinances, then you shall live and become numerous, and the LORD your God will bless you in the land that you are entering to possess.

But if your heart turns away and you do not hear, but are led astray to bow down to other gods and serve them, I declare to you today that you shall perish; you shall not live long in the land that you are crossing the Jordan to enter and possess.

I call heaven and earth to witness against you today that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Choose life so that you and your descendants may live, loving the LORD your God, obeying, and holding fast to The Divine; for that means life to you and length of days, so that you may live in the land that the LORD swore to give to your ancestors, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob.

Ok...before I get into this passage, I think it is helpful to make sure we know what has happened in the history of our ancestors the Israelites in their journey together with Moses who in this passage is giving them his farewell speech before they enter the promised land and he dies.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N7WqYnnypPw> starting at 24:07-25:51

Thank you sparkhouse video for that review.

Moses, whose origin story is filled with miraculous moments and a continued call to lead people who are well... people, just like him wholly flawed and in need of guidance and one another.

I appreciate the lens of humanity this vignette gives us on what it is like to lead people... it's like he can't win - getting them through the red sea, destroying those who would hurt them and 40 years in the desert and so close to the promised land. Moses is a man after my own heart...what more could you people want?

Last week Richard shared some wisdom from our time at a conference called Fraught and Flummoxed. The theme of the conference is where we find Moses and where I think many of us find ourselves right now. We had rich teaching and conversation around where we find ourselves fraught and flummoxed, in our lives, in this world and in this work of being and leading church.

Fraught conjures up images of undesired things or situations and instances causing anxiety and unrest.

Flummoxed is almost a state of constant uneasiness or confusion.

How many of us have felt Fraught and Flummoxed in the last few months?

How might this scripture inform and guide us through these feelings while helping us clarify how we might draw closer to God, renewing our commitment to Faith in God?

Some congregational participation is needed... if you are here in person, we have folx with microphones who will make sure your answers are heard. Marcia will be checking the chat and sharing responses from there. Here is the first:

Please finish these sentences for me.

I have unwavering support of or for _____.

(responses aloud or in chat)

Our nation has unwavering support of or for _____
(responses aloud or in chat)

Our church has unwavering support for _____
(responses aloud or in chat)

I have been asking myself these questions since we were at the conference. And also these ones:

(slide in the drive for 2/12)

What do we have unwavering support for?

What is acceptable to have unwavering support for?

What do we not want to admit we have unwavering support for?

How can we get more curious about how these are not in alignment with one another?

The statue that you see pictured on the bulletin and on the screen is a monument that I grew up seeing often as a child.

It stands prominently at the foothills of the Wasatch mountains in Salt Lake City. It features Heber C. Kimball, Brigham Young, and Wilford Woodruff who were seen as both the lead pioneers and the ones called to establish the Salt Lake Valley as “the place” where the Mormon faith would flourish and grow.

This monument and many like this can be idolatrous. Not to say that we are praying to monuments but that we have blinders on how much significance we put on them. When we understand them to be harmful and get in the way of relationships with one another they can certainly have the same effect on our relationship with the Divine. Idolatry can be much more subtle than we have come to define it.

Clearly, we have been more aware of monuments in the last five years or so. It is a marker and a visible reminder of something that holds importance while creating an emotional attachment that can lead to idolatry. It was at the center of the history of Utah and subsequently the entire of my 8th grade Utah (Mormon) history class.

The larger the monument is, the more pronounced it can be in our memories... especially for someone like me that is very visual and upon first memory of this monument was young and shorter...

The thing is, monuments are limited - they hold up one part of the story while leaving out so many important details, which usually are the ones we should be paying more attention to, and doing our best to hold both in order to inform us.

In my education it was never pointed out what kind of colonization must have been required in order for these pioneers to claim this land as theirs. I was educated without encouragement to question why I didn't see myself in the story and where my lineage intersected in this history. I was also on the outside of the deeply emotional connection these stories had in the lives of those of my peers who claimed the Mormon faith as their own.

In retrospect I see how this monument and the revisionist history I was taught created a barrier for me to ever understand my place in "this is the place".

Now, it would be easy for me to stand here and tell you all the ways ownership, wealth, and revisionist history was unique to Mormon pioneers and generations to follow. Can you recall some ways that ownership, wealth and revisionist history have kept us all in a state of false comfort? Those generational narratives that make us feel more righteous and superior to others... this is the work of white supremacy culture.

This country has had a history of large monuments. In this century we created monuments of everything. It might be our dependence on energy that keeps us diminishing resources faster than they can replenish in order to be a superpower, or the art piece that has been in the family for years that everyone wants, churches do this with flowers, furniture and designated giving... the lure of ultimate power authority and control has become for us all an idol. Intertwined in this is the continual separation of our humanity. The more we buy into supremacy culture and the lie that there is one way of thinking, the less aware we become that interdependence is how we were created. The illusion of independence separates us and makes us believe we are not connected when everything we do is.

If this false comfort and lack of interdependence separates us, it also keeps us from deepening our loyalty and faith in God.

This passage is thought to be the final speech of Moses to the people before they are to occupy the promised land. As a way of truth telling history, he recounts it and then he doesn't just say, "Here it is... This is the place- go get it." He knows they are fickle and need a reminder of how what we do matters- emphasis on we... we are not independent of one another.

Moses addresses the people in a particular form that would have been understood as a treaty of sorts. But like most of what transformational stories in scripture do, Moses turns this understood treaty on its head. Traditionally treaties were made between rulers. Other officials were present and the people were witnesses to the agreement. The terms had ramifications for all but were ultimately the responsibility of those who agreed to the treaty.

The treaty Moses speaks of outlines the history of the people, mind you not once in this speech is Moses addressing individuals. This treaty is between God and the people - US.

The terms for us are clear: we are to obey, love, walk in God's way and observe the commandments.

The sin is idolatry leading to alienation and tone deafness leading us astray.

The witnesses would have typically been people who would keep each party accountable for their end of the treaty. They would also be a part of the consequences given for breach of this promise. Moses states that the witnesses are Heaven and Earth (the parallels and ramifications of what we are experiencing from the earth is another sermon but woah...)

Finally, Moses employs us to "choose life." The Hebrew translates not into a singular choice but one that points to an as yet unresolved decision....it is organic, living, and constant. This choice toward life is an opportunity God has given us forever. No longer are we talking about theology with God reigning retribution on us for our sin but the possibility of liberation...not for the individual but for the collective... God's people. God is present- always, abandonment is never on the table which is so hard for us to grasp in a world where cancel culture and individuality reign. God's reign is about ALL OF US.

It is never too late for us to correct course... together with a deeper, more interconnected understanding of God, our relationship with God and in this community of faith without letting idols get in the way of our collective liberation.

I invite us to now affirm our faith together. Not because we all believe the same thing but because we are a collective of God's people wanting to recommit ourselves to honoring God through our interconnectedness. This affirmation of faith is a gift from the writers of Enfleshed.com

Let us affirm what we believe together:

We believe that our spiritual invitation is to follow the example of Jewish teacher, Palestinian refugee, and poor person, Jesus: to live in community; to share our resources; to centralize the stories of poor people, children, and people of

marginalized genders; to turn power structures on their heads. We honor all teachers who show us how to defy abusive structures and how to co-create expansive ways of living.

We believe in rooting out the holds that the systemic sins of white supremacy, cisheterosexism, misogyny, ableism and Christian supremacy have on our hearts, our behaviors, and our patterns of thinking.

We believe that liberation is experienced through our bodies and that our liberation is bound up with one another's.

We believe in access to healthcare, to freetime, to safety, to a home, to nourishing food, and to clean water for all people and creatures. We believe in joy, play, rest, dance, pleasure, creativity, tenderness, and shared abundance.

We believe that God — Faithful Advocate, Lure Towards Compassion, Blessed Interdependence, Great Mystery, Holy Becoming, Sacred Undoing — is with us, is in us, and moves between us. We believe that resurrection is both a gritty spiritual practice and happens without our effort, as a gift, as the seasons change. We believe that all beings are worthy of flourishing. Amen.