

Deuteronomy 4:1-24

Managing Transitions

I am a real scaredy cat when it come to travel. I love traveling but I always go into it with fear and trepidation. Recently our daughter suggested that we go on a vacation to New York this summer with her, her husband, and our granddaughter. As she noted there are advantages to taking grandparents on vacation when your daughter is six years old.

It didn't take us long to book the trip, but I shared with her how much it pleased me to be going with them, because I am pretty afraid of new experiences even when I know they will be exciting and good. I like it that our son-in-law has been to New York before and he will be able to be somewhat of a guide for us.

I remember my first trip on the subway in Toronto to the University. A trip I would make hundreds of times in the next three years, but that first trip on my own I will not forget. Janelle, my daughter, had taken a trial run with me, but on that first time by myself, I had all the directions as to which train to take written down. I held on to that tightly. Still, especially on my way home, I found myself getting off the train walking to where I could get cell reception underground, and calling Janelle to make sure that I was still headed the right way and on the right train.

It does not help that I am severely directionally challenged, but I knew that if I was going to experience what I truly wanted to do in life then I would have to face the fear and get on with it. Wish those were the only two examples, but I could draw from a storehouse of moments that I was afraid.

When I think of that fear and reflect on it, I believe there are a number of factors that play into it, but much of it revolves around identity. The biggest piece might be the fear of being lost in a crowd, just plain old lost, or that I might lose something of myself in the experience.

Unknowns impact us when we endeavor to step away from what is comfortable and familiar. Not knowing the people, the directions, the way, can all make us fearful. Rachel Bouwkamp, who prepared the outline for this series on transitions writes, "Life transitions are challenging because they force us to let go of the familiar and face an unknown future with feelings of vulnerability or even helplessness."¹

The scripture reading was a story of Moses revisiting some very important information, and delivering it in the form of an inspiring speech, as the Israelites prepare to make

¹ Bouwkamp, Rachel. [Reformed Worship 143 © March 2022](#) Worship Ministries of the Christian Reformed Church.

their way into what would be their promised land. These words in particular are very much centered on the law of God and are referred to in various ways by Moses in these 24 verses as statutes and ordinances, commandments, entire law, and covenant. He spends a lot of time conveying to the people just how important these were, but how would this help them as they crossed the border from their forty years of wandering the desert to transitioning to the land of Canaan? Why are these things important?

Rather than seeing the commandments as a way to earn salvation, the law for the Israelites was very much intertwined with their identity. They had a God who was so near that they could call to him, one who cared enough about their well-being, their living, that God covenanted with them, created a formal agreement with them, similar to a treaty. I heard that a definition of treaty is “how we agree to treat each other.” For God the law was a guide for how people would be in relationship with God and with one another...how they would treat each other.

The identity of the people was linked to those commandments, not because they restricted their lives, but rather because those statutes and ordinances gave meaning and purpose to all that they did and why they did it.

At this moment in their history the people were going through a major transition and they knew they were going to do it without their leader Moses. Without the one person who had stood in the very presence of God, the one who had come down from the mountain carrying two stone tablets with the law written on them. The people were leaving what was familiar, what was known, what had become comfortable, to cross into unknown territory, with a new person at the helm and it was scary.

What Moses was doing when he spoke to them about paying attention to the statutes and ordinances, to remembering them, teaching them, passing the understanding on from one generation to the next, was to position the people in the trust, love, grace, hope, and joy of God. They were to remember their history with God, and not only that, but to look forward to where they were being led, where they were going, because they did not go alone.

No matter where they were they could find their identity in the one who had covenanted with them, who had set out how they would treat each other and their relationship with the God who wanted to protect and love them. This is true for us as well as Jesus said in Matthew 5:17, “Do not think I have come to abolish the law or the prophets, I have come not to abolish but to fulfil.”

As they were positioning themselves for this transition, moving from their wandering ways to a place they could call home, they were told by Moses how to manage their fear, the unknowns, the moving away from their comfort zones. It was by firmly placing themselves in the observance, teaching, learning, and watching of how they lived in relationship with everyone, including those who they would encounter on the way, that would enable them to manage this transition.

Moses says to them they will be an example for all nations, where nations will declare “Surely this great nation is a wise and discerning people!” (v6). Their God is close to them and has made a treaty with them. The treaty though is not just God doing for them, but their part is to remember God, to remember these statutes and ordinances, to take care and watch themselves closely, so as neither to forget the things that their eyes have seen nor to let them slip from their mind.

Yes, God is powerful, and as it says in the last verse, a jealous God, but that is because God is loving and longs to be in relationship with people. The very simplistic example of this would be how a parent sets boundaries and rules for a child, not to harm or limit, but to protect and teach. It is within the boundaries set by our parents and the boundaries and teaching of God that we learn about who we are.

Transitions, the emotions and the physical events that go with that, can be managed when we know who we are and that we do not go into anything new without God with us. It is for you to recognize the transitions in your life and to choose how to manage them, but be assured that if you keep Christ at the center, listening for the Holy Spirit to guide, and trusting God’s presence, you will not lose yourself in it. As our congregation moves from who we are now to a New Beginning, we will do the same.

Thanks be to God for the promises, the love, and the hope to move through transitions with grace and steadfast trust. Amen.