

Deuteronomy 31:1-13

A Healthy Transition

In business and organizations there is often talk and work done for succession planning. Succession planning is essentially determining who and how things will move forward into the future once those in place now resign, die, or otherwise move on from their places of prominence, position, or power. Growing up around farmers, at one time it was almost a given that the oldest son would take over the farm. It was certainly not guaranteed, but for some time that was the expectation. I have seen large farms with multiple families involved in the operation spend considerable time figuring out how to provide for those who have been in charge and are now retired or for family members whose spouse has died, and the next generation takes over the responsibilities for the land and operations.

In some families that have grown in business that certainly also has been the case. One can think of the Paterson Family locally, or the McCain family nationally to name just a couple. Organizations need succession planning as well. I once taught piano using a method that had been developed by a woman living in Dartmouth called *Music for Young Children*[™]. The company has grown from a family operation from their home to an international music program based out of Kanata, ON and I remember when they were doing their succession planning in order to ensure that the program would always be available to people long after she would end her day-to-day involvement.

Locally, I have recently read on Facebook that the Underground Gym has a succession plan in place. Peter Panetta wrote, "My daughter Chyenne...is the now the legal successor to the Underground Gym. Good thing 'cause 2 weeks ago I had my 2nd heart attack in 10 years. I am okay (2 stents) but I definitely have to make some major changes to continue to work with the children. I love them all like my own & I am not ready to leave them yet. My work is not done." Peter states that his work is not done, and yet he knows that a plan needs to be in place.

Succession planning has been a part of the human experience, and the scripture reading today imparts the succession plan of the Israelites as they prepare to cross over the Jordan into what is referred to as the Promised Land. This particular reading is part of a longer discourse from Moses as he knows that he will not be crossing over with them. He is preparing them for the change in leadership, and sharing knowledge and wisdom that will determine how they step into this future story.

Moses informs them that Joshua will cross over before the people, he will be their leader now, but even more so and most importantly, he says, "The Lord your God

himself will cross over before you.” (v3) God will go before his people preparing the way, and being present with them.

Now before I go further, I know that without reading the whole story some may wonder why God will destroy nations and dispossess them so that the Israelites can have their land. There are two things that may be helpful here. One is that God created all people, but many nations and tribes, as is the fact today, were filled with greed and a desire for power and control and so in the story we hear, those people are removed from their lands. Secondly, this is a story particular to the people of Israel. It was told from their perspective. What is not evident in this passage is that Deuteronomy is a teaching on a treaty of sorts. As long as the people were obedient to God, following the teachings of the Ten Commandments, which held relationships with God and others in high regard, well if there was obedience then there would be blessing. The flip side of this is that where there was disobedience, a wandering away from those things that kept people in good relationship with God and others, then there would be curse or some might say, troubles and misfortune.

God wanted the people to rely on God’s presence and provision to sustain them. Trust and care were needed for the relationship to flourish. Moses in this part of his speech is telling the people, and Joshua as well, that in no uncertain terms they are to be strong and bold, because it is God who goes with them. Moses says to the people and Joshua himself, in the same words, “He will not fail you or forsake you.” In other words, God’s got this.

The people are facing unknowns, unknown people, unknown land, unknown and unforeseen circumstances and they are told, God’s got this. In this big transition of their lived experience from one leader to another, from being nomads to settled people, from one country to another, God is present, God goes before them. And what they have heard, what they will continue to do, is share that promise with the generations to come. Which is why the command to hear this over and over again. A reminder of what has been and how God has always been present, has always gone before, has provided.

As Christians in this time of Lent it is also a reminder to us that through Christ, who is our promise and with whom we have relationship, the one who has fulfilled all that the Israelites hoped for in their relationship with God, we too live in promised land. Rachel Bouwkamp says it this way, “The promised Land is not a geographic place like Canaan or heaven or, for that matter the U.S. or Mexico or Canada. The Promised Land is the place into which the Lord our God crosses over before us. It is anywhere and everywhere our God resides. It is not a nation. It is not a language. The Promised Land is the presence of God.”¹

The presence of God is always there for us, we may not recognize it but when we are in relationship with God, taking time to nurture that relationship, and nurturing relationship

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

with others, whether they be the person you live with, the store clerk, or any others, God goes with us. We can be strong and bold trusting that God is present.

The presence of God is near, what can take practice is trusting that God goes before us as well. I have made a habit over many decades of asking God to go before me into my day and into my moments, and into the big things like New Beginnings that our church is working through. I have asked God to go before my friends and family facing health issues or struggle or celebrations and amazing life changes. I don't think I realized until reading this passage that this was a promise that goes back to Moses.

So, I encourage you to trust that God is present, to ask God to go before you and those you love, to go before nations seeking peace and security whether it be food security for all or bodily security and safety. We can trust that God's got this. God had the Israelites and God's got us through Christ. For our part, we are to trust, to live in ways that are life giving for ourselves and others, to trust that in our transitions in life a way is being made whether as individuals or as a church.

God has got this. God has got you. Live in grace, in hope, in love, in the knowledge that God is present and God goes before you, as you and others, as churches and countries, transition through the challenges, struggles, good changes and into a future hope. Amen.