

“Walking in the Way of God”

Psalm 25:1-10; Deuteronomy 30:15-20 – Tesa Hauser
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Holy God, bless the speaking and the hearing of these words, that we might boldly commit to live out our faith. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Do you all remember the poem, “Footprints in the Sand?” It’s about a person who dreamed that they saw their life in terms of a walk along the beach with God. There are two sets of footprints throughout the years, one set is God’s, and the second set is the persons. However, the person is confused that there are moments in their life when they were going through hardship or tribulation, that there are only one pair of feet in the sand. At the end of their life, bothered by this, the person asks why there was only one set when God had promised to never leave us nor forsake us. God responds that those times were when God carried the person.

Over the years, people have changed the ending to the poem, to be funny and more relatable. There are some endings related to themes in Star Wars, or jokes about moments when there is a long strand where it looks like God had to drag the person, or random holes where God put the person to get a hot dog. It is a beautiful poem about God’s faithfulness, and there is this vulnerability that comes with being held or carried. It is one of the most important things for new mothers and parents to do with their newborn child to bond and create a secure attachment. To hold them close, and to have skin to skin contact. I wonder if there were

moments when the person in the poem forgot that they stretched out their arms asking God to please comfort and carry them.

The poem provides an idyllic notion of a life with God, though it mentions hardships, of a life at the beach. Now, I know that sand isn't easy to walk in, and the real message of the poem is that God's promises to never leave us nor forsake us are true. Walking in the ways of God isn't easy either and the "path" for each person will be different. The Israelites Moses is talking to, nor the post-exilic community that is the ultimate audience of Deut. 30, may not have related to the poem. The sand part maybe, but 40 years in the wilderness after being in bondage, and then being exiled from the land promised by God, don't sound like life at the beach.

One community at the precipice of everything they had been waiting for, the land that was promised to them, filled with abundance. Was it really true, would all they had struggled through been in vain? The other, believing that their lack of faith, lack of following God's commandments and decrees led them to be forcibly removed from their land and having to rebuild from the ashes. I push back on the notion that the Israelites lack of following God, was the reason for the demise of their nation(s). It was the norm for empires and countries, to ebb and flow at such a time. Especially a nation of their size, and with their own internal issues and struggles. They tried to make sense of their situation as best as they could.

Moses' speech is encouraging both communities to have faith, courage, and hope, especially in a situation that seemed helpless. Moses provides only two sets of options to choose from: life and prosperity or death and adversity. This made me chuckle when I first read it. If these are the two options, then I obviously want the first and never the second. However, these options are not about what we want from life on the outside, but from what we, as the people of God, choose daily in our lives and walk with God. Stay with me here.

Moses and the Israelite people knew death and adversity are inescapable, they are coming out of times of bondage and the wilderness where many of their people died, and where they faced hardships often. Again, the post-exilic community are also aware of this. Moses says, as people of God we have the chance to create a life, to create a community, to create hope and courage and faith within us that will allow us to continue during the hardships. How do we start creating a game plan where instead of being on the defense, reacting to what is happening to us? We are living a life on the offense, preparing proactively for what is to come, where we choose life!

How do we do this according to Moses? In Deuteronomy Moses presents it in two different ways. In Deut. 30:16, Moses says we keep God's commandments, decrees, and ordinances, we love God, and we walk in God's ways. In verse 20 Moses again says, we love God, obey God, and listen to God. Twice, loving God is

mentioned. For we are to love God, with all our heart, with all our soul, and with our strength according to Deuteronomy 6:5. It isn't just an emotion, but as one commentary I read said, "It involves a holistic commitment to be and to do." This goes hand in hand with keeping God's commandments, it tells us how we should act towards God and towards one another, with the rest of humanity and creation. Walking in God's ways means obeying and listening to what God has said, which we can do if we love God and follow what God has prepared for us in God's commandments and covenant. We trust God to be who God says they are, who they have shown to be, and we then respond accordingly.

We do the work not just when it's hard or in reaction, but in the moments of stillness and goodness. We walk in the way of God, so when the terrain of the journey gets rough, for it will, we can have hope that we aren't alone. There is hope, that along will come the path of less resistance. In the previous verses Moses says to the people, that they know the commandments, they know what the writing says, in their hearts and on their lips. I can imagine Psalm 25 was on the hearts and the lips of the post-exilic community, a poem crying out for guidance and deliverance. Trusting God to be who God says they are. We too like the Psalmist can ask to know the ways of God, to learn how to love God and others. We too proclaim and know that God's love is steadfast, and that God is faithful.

Though we are not that community and though we have not faced their struggles, we are too in need of guidance to choose life. Walking in the way of God looks very different for our context. My favorite part of these guidelines from Moses is that there is nuance within them; the living God that we worship and follow, is creative. We see it in the uniqueness of each person, and creation itself. Each person's journey is different, but there are many more footprints in the sand if we zoom out. There is the partnership, and community of God, as the body of Christ. Let us think about what it looks like to walk in the way of God together.

What community partnerships are we not paying attention to, or who else has the same passions for climate change, racial justice, for immigration or our unhoused neighbors, as we do? What life giving work can we do, so that others may experience life, may experience the good news? Who is already doing the work? They may be farther down the path, but you won't be alone as you catch up. Many of us know the Word of God, many of us have encountered the living Christ and the Spirit, that have provided guidance on the path we are on. Walking with God or in the way of God, sometimes means being carried by God. The living, faithful, steadfast God will carry you and the load, and sometimes we are helping in the carrying and sometimes we are being carried. Walk in the way of God, for there you will find life. Alleluia and Amen.