

Transitions

Fourth Sunday in Lent

Joshua 5:9-12

⁹ The LORD said to Joshua, "Today I have rolled away from you the disgrace of Egypt." And so that place is called Gilgal to this day.

¹⁰ While the Israelites were camped in Gilgal they kept the Passover in the evening on the fourteenth day of the month in the plains of Jericho. ¹¹ On the day after the Passover, on that very day, they ate the produce of the land, unleavened cakes and parched grain. ¹² The manna ceased on the day they ate the produce of the land, and the Israelites no longer had manna; they ate the crops of the land of Canaan that year.

You can read what Richard B. Joelson, Doctor of Social Work, says in his article *Managing Difficult Life Transitions* at: <https://richardbjoelsonsw.com/.../managing-difficult-life-transitions>.

On yesterday I attended what was meant to be a 94th birthday party for a family friend. Unfortunately, with her death on Wednesday, two days before her birthday, it was a celebration of her life. It reminded me that her daughter, grand children, and great grand children have a major transition in their lives. There has never been a time in her life when the daughter could not pick up the phone and ask for her mother's counsel and encouragement. The grand children and great grand children will miss her wisdom and kindness. They must go on without her. They are in a period of transition.

We all go through transitions in life...leaving our parents' home, going off for a higher education, getting married, getting a new job, becoming a parent, loss of a loved one. Each transition redefines who we are in relation to others and our environment.

We know from scripture God is always saving people, leading them into new places and new possibilities. Our passage in Joshua details how the forty years of wilderness wandering for the Israelites were coming to an end. Moses had led the people that far, but in this new place they had a new leader named Joshua. They had been wandering for

forty years, having escaped the oppression of the Egyptians. They had not yet entered into the land of promise.

The reproach of the Egyptians in this text was their refusal to believe in or obey the God of the Hebrews. God's promise to the Israelites was that they would enter and possess a land of milk and honey. Their entering the land showed that God's promise to them was real and effective. Despite the fact that the Israelites had not always been good, God had always been good to them. In the wilderness they were fed manna, a direct provision from God. They wandered for years in utter dependence upon God. Now the land of promise lay before them, a land of opportunities.

Yet Joshua was aware of the dangers of new opportunities. He understood the danger that God's people might commit themselves to the fertility gods of Canaan. The shame and disgrace of the slavery they experienced in Egypt were behind them, but new idolatries lie before them.

Often we find ourselves at this same crossroads, in times of transition. Despite past disgraces, God forgives and presents us with new opportunities for service and faithfulness. The future lies before us, yet we are still far from where we should be. As we reflect about our relationship to God, it is good to consider Joshua and the first Passover in Canaan.

For the younger Israelites, the exodus was important, but it was history. Their parents celebrated Passover, but most of them died in the wilderness. So these young Israelites knew God, but not from the Passover night. They knew the God of the wilderness—the God of quail and of manna, of provision. These people were excited; they were poised to enter the Promised Land. Jericho was nearby. The land looked good, but it was not empty; it contained great riches, temptations, and resistance. As the people paused upon the plain, Joshua knew that they must reestablish covenant. Before they came into contact with the people of the land—with people who did not know or obey their God—they must clarify their beliefs.

So God had Joshua circumcise the young men. Circumcision reminded the people that they were set apart. It was a symbol of the covenant. It was also symbolic of their commitment to be different from the Egyptians behind them and the Canaanites ahead of them. Joshua made the men take this step before they entered the Promised Land. In that land, the old and the new would each have their rightful places. Passover and circumcision reminded the people where they came from. Manna also reminded them how God provided for them in the wilderness, but manna was a part of the past in a new land flowing with milk and honey. Manna required neither settlement nor work; it merely needed to be gathered. The Promised Land, however, was to be developed. So Joshua and the people feasted upon the new food of the new land! Their spirits were high, as well they should be, for the land of promise was finally theirs.

In our seasons of transition, we too must be circumcised. We must examine ourselves and do a spiritual and moral inventory. Our old commitments and sins, our spiritual foreskins, must be cut away and cast off. We must confess and repent in order to grow and prosper. In every generation this is our task. We cannot depend on our parents – we have to develop faith for ourselves. The faith of our fore parents cannot be passed by osmosis to us. As Americans, most of us are financially more secure than the rest of the world. Yet wealth is both blessing and temptation. It is wonderful to live in a land flowing with milk and honey, but it is also easy to rely more on the land than on the Giver of the land. Our riches can lure us to celebrate ourselves rather than the Holy One who provides for us, calling us to seek our treasures first in heaven rather than on earth. Our truest calling is to watch and pray and work for the reign of God. There we can enjoy milk and honey; there we can even drink living water. First, we must covenant afresh with the God who leads us into new and challenging futures. Before we can begin our new endeavors, ministries, and missions, we must circumcise our hearts, cutting away the old foreskins of past sins and past failures. We must also be careful to dethrone our modern idols. Our reliance upon such idols leaves us open to sudden and terrible

reversals. The land still has milk and honey, yet we know that we cannot live on milk and honey—or bread—alone, but only by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God.

Like Joshua's Israelites, we too must confess that we are not the people we should be. God is still leading people out of disgraceful wandering situations into genuine divine blessings. This way of being in the land requires prayer, meditation, confession of sins, and repentance. Once we have prepared ourselves to follow God into the wonderful provisions of our promised land, we can enjoy both the land and the feast in due time in joy. **Darryl M. Trimiew**

We are always going through times of transition – becoming caregivers to a spouse or parent, moving to a new community, other challenges of life. God has promised to be with us, providing our needs, renewing and strengthening our relationship day by day and always walking with us, no matter the challenges or transition.

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