

Rev Sonja L. Ingebritsen
MCC Worship Reflection
February 14, 2016
Deuteronomy 26:1-11
Luke 4:1-13

There they were. There they were! The people of Israel, so close, finally, to the Promised Land. They were beginning to imagine what life should be like for them there. After forty years of wandering in the desert, they could almost taste the fruits of the land after years and years of manna, day in and day out.

They were so close that they could imagine the joy of stepping into freedom and a new day of belonging again. So often during their wandering they doubted whether it would ever happen, if God hadn't abandoned them.

But in their anticipated homecoming, they centered themselves on the truth that God had been with them since before their exodus, and even before their captivity—that God had made a covenant with them, and had, in fact, been with them in every circumstance. They centered themselves on the fact that faithfulness and justice were, in fact, part of the essential nature of the God of their lives and their ancestors'.

And so, the people of Israel already knew—even before their homecoming had been affected—that celebration, thanksgiving, and just living were all essential in their response to their God. Thank offerings of the very best and first fruits of the land were anticipated. They were to be given out of gratitude to the One who had carried them through the desert. And they were to be given to provide for others, in the same way that their God had provided for them. Listen to how this is described in the next verse of Deuteronomy 26, which is just beyond our lectionary reading:

“When you have set aside the tenth of all your produce in the third year, the year of the tithe, give it to the Levite, the foreigner, the orphan, and the widowed, so that they may eat in your towns and be satisfied.”

The people of the Madison Christian Community have been wanderers of late, too. Not for forty years, not fleeing slavery, and not physically relocating, but nonetheless traveling a road that had some unknowns and its own kinds of dangers. You needed to make decisions about pastoral leadership and about whether and how Advent Lutheran and Community of Hope UCC would continue a partnership. And, like the people of Israel, you carried hope that God would see you through your journey.

And now here *we* are. Here we are! Decisions have been made to entrust Nick and me as your pastors. Decisions have been made to strengthen the ecumenical partnership in ways that weren't possible before. Decisions have been made to affirm the MCC shared values. These values include: engaging in the stewardship of creation, respecting diversity, honoring the distinct worship style of each congregation, pursue common outreach ministries, providing hospitality to all, and delighting in the presence and grace of the Holy.

These decisions have been made, but we will be living into them for a long time. What we as people of faith have learned from the travel stories of our spiritual ancestors, is that we remain a people on the journey. Until such time as the kin-dom of God, the Beloved Community, is fully realized, we too are wanderers. But we are travelers encouraged by our ancestors to know the hallmarks of living into the grace of God's promise.

And so today, we celebrate God's faithfulness that has brought us to this point. We celebrate the promise that is yet to unfold. We give thanks to the one who has carried us thus far. And we remember that the gifts of God are not for us alone. They are meant to be shared—even as we might be tempted to keep the Good News to ourselves, for our own benefit.

I'm thrilled that you have invited Pastor Nick and me to travel this next part of the journey with you. I look forward to all the ways that God's Spirit will call us to celebrate, give thanks, and be in ministry to and with those who are our neighbors.