

NUMBERS 13:30 -- 14:1-4

³⁰ Then Caleb silenced the people before Moses and said, "We should go up and take possession of the land, for we can certainly do it."

³¹ But the men who had gone up with him said, "We can't attack those people; they are stronger than we are." ³² And they spread among the Israelites a bad report about the land they had explored. They said, "The land we explored devours those living in it. All the people we saw there are of great size. ³³ We saw the Nephilim there (the descendants of Anak come from the Nephilim). We seemed like grasshoppers in our own eyes, and we looked the same to them."

14 That night all the members of the community raised their voices and wept aloud. ² All the Israelites grumbled against Moses and Aaron, and the whole assembly said to them, "If only we had died in Egypt! Or in this wilderness! ³ Why is the LORD bringing us to this land only to let us fall by the sword? Our wives and children will be taken as plunder. Wouldn't it be better for us to go back to Egypt?" ⁴ And they said to each other, "We should choose a leader and go back to Egypt."

PATTI

As St. John's prepares to offer worship in our building again beginning this Sunday, we realize that not everyone will be comfortable meeting in a larger group right now. We felt that there may still be value in a mid-week teaching for those who are continuing to shelter in place. Jeff and I have enjoyed doing these mid-week sermon reflections together, and plan to continue them, at least for a season.

Having said that, lots of people are talking about "getting back to normal." Or returning to some sort of "new normal" that involves masks, social distancing, and lots of handwashing.

In the Scripture that we just read from the book of Numbers, the Israelite spies come back from scoping out the land that God had promised to their ancestors.

All the way back in Genesis 22, God had told Abraham,
 “I will surely bless you, and I will multiply your descendants like the stars in the sky
 and the sand on the seashore. Your descendants will possess the gates of their enemies.
 And through your offspring all nations of the earth will be blessed.

But now they’re right on the edge of the promised land, and the
 People decide to form a “Go back to Egypt Committee” and even
 elect leaders to spearhead the effort.

So we have to wonder, “What exactly is going on here?”
 The people are actually beginning to talk longingly about SLAVERY,
 as though it wasn’t really all that bad.

JEFF

Yeah, it seems that there may be a couple of things happening here.
 The first is that when the Israelites were slaves in Egypt,
 Pharoah had made a sort of unspoken agreement with them...

*“You make bricks for my building projects and I’ll provide you
 (most days) with enough food to eat.”*

This makes me wonder about these last few months, which have
 been a wilderness (of sorts) as people all across the world have
 sheltered in place,
 worked from home,
 and homeschooled children.

This text makes me wonder what deals we’ve made with Egypt.
 In other words, what temptations have we settled for
 that are less than what God has promised?

What temptations are lurking even today that would
 keep us from the future God has in store,
 and the mission to which He’s calling us?

PATTI

For Israel it was **comfort** and **security**, right?

That was the temptation.

Because God is always inviting us to **join Him in His work.**

And this invitation, this call, **always leads to a crisis of belief that requires faith and action.**

We see this throughout the Bible.

God calls Abram and says, "leave your home and go to a place I will show you."

Moses had been a prince, a murderer, and a fugitive.

Finally in old age, he's settled into a quiet life as a shepherd, and God shows up in a burning bush and says, "you're going to be my representative to challenge Pharaoh."

We see this principal at work throughout the entire Bible...

that whenever God calls someone -

whether it's Ruth or Jonah or Mary the mother of Jesus, or the Apostle Paul -

each time God's invitation to join him in His work

leads to a crisis of belief that requires FAITH and ACTION.

JEFF

Yes. Because I can't be the same person and keep doing what I've been doing and also follow where God is leading.

In order for that to happen, there are ADJUSTMENTS that need to be made in my heart and mind and actions.

ADJUSTMENTS that lead to obedience.

Whether we think about it in these terms or not,

this is what is happening on Sunday mornings and throughout the week when we confess our sins and hear the promise of forgiveness.

REPENTANCE is more than being sorry for breaking God's covenant commandments in the past, it's also making ADJUSTMENTS for the future! Confession is REALIGNING my life with God's PRIORITIES.

And here's how that has worked for me in these past months. Two temptations for me in this time of sheltering in place have been to stay **busy** or stay **distracted**.

In some ways I think the devil is satisfied whether I'm just **finding project after project to do around the house** (you might not be mad about that either)... But whether I'm busy doing projects or distracted by binge-watching Netflix,

both of these things, which aren't necessarily bad in themselves, can keep me from hearing God's invitation,

Busyness on the one hand, or distraction on the other, can keep me from responding in faith, and acting on the adjustments that God wants me to make in this season.

Here's an example of what I mean. Before Covid-19 hit, I had a tendency to be overcommitted. I'm a person that has a hard time saying 'NO'.

There something within me that has a desire to please people

and gain their approval, and so when I'm asked to do something, I say yes to quickly.

Consequently, the good things keep me from the best things. Or I'm doing a lot of things, but I'm not giving my best effort to any of them.

So the ADJUSTMENT I've been making these past months, with the help of the Holy Spirit, is to spend more time with God in His Word and in prayer....

To grow in my relationship with the Lord to the point where **I only care about pleasing Him.**

PATTI

So I think what you're saying in a way, is that obedience leads to freedom and to a deeper relationship with God.

JEFF

Yes, that's it.

Only then will I have the freedom to say NO to lesser things so that I can say yes to the BEST THINGS.

PATTI

But you can't obey – we can't obey – apart from Jesus. The whole Exodus story points to Him.

He is the new Moses,
who leads us out of slavery to sin.
He is the new Moses, who wins our freedom, not by bringing a plague of death upon the firstborn of our enemies,

but by dying on a cross Himself,
as the only begotten Son of the Father.

Jesus is the new Moses who leads us into
the Promised land of His kingdom.
Not through the waters of the Red Sea,
but through the waters of our baptism.

Jesus is the new Moses, who
forgives us when we fall prey to temptation,
but gives us the Holy Spirit
who empowers us for obedience.

to make adjustments in our lives so that we can
join Jesus in His mission to bless and redeem the world.

So what tempts you to settle for less than Jesus has promised?
What kind of **comfort** or **security**
do you need to say no to in order to
trust God in this next season?

What sort of **busyness** or **distraction**
do you need to say **NO** to in order to
follow where He is leading?

What adjustments to you need to make
in order to join God in His mission?

PRAYER:

Lord, in the midst of all that is happening in our world, we pray for your kingdom to come and your will to be done among us here and now as it is in heaven. We know that in order for that to happen, things will need to change. That WE will need to change. So fill us with your Holy Spirit that there is no room for doubt or fear. So fill us with your Holy Spirit that there is only freedom to obey, and follow where you lead. In Jesus glory and in His name we pray. Amen.