

Deuteronomy 30: 9-14
Proper 10, Year C
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Trinity Episcopal Church
Sonoma, California

Standing on the Threshold
A Sermon Preached by the Rev. Susan Allison-Hatch

Here we are a people standing at a threshold, a people poised on the verge of the future, a people about to enter new territory. It's been a long time coming.

I wonder if the Israelites standing on the plains of Moab listening to Moses might have felt similarly. There they were – a people on a threshold, a people poised on the verge of the future, a people about to enter new territory – the Promised Land was what they called it. It had been a long time coming.

There they were – men and women, old and young – babies even. Some new to the community. Some there from the very beginning. Some born in the wilderness and now with children of their own. There they were – the respected and the overlooked, the weary and the restless, the warriors and the priests. There they were – a people about to enter new land.

I wonder how they felt as they faced their future.

I can imagine some were excited. I suspect there were those who could hardly wait to cross that river. Some just chomping at the bit to get to the Promised Land. Yet there must have been some who had grown comfortable with their life of wandering, some who had settled into the routines of the wilderness and were reluctant to cross that river. Surely there were those who were anxious about the future. After all new beginnings are fraught with uncertainty.

I can imagine all of them wondered how they would live in the new land they were about to enter.

To them all, to “all of Israel”, to a people he has journeyed with, a people he has loved, Moses speaks his final words.

Last words often carry a special charge, a special meaning. Often times they are the most important words a person can say to a community or to another person. Often they are the words a person wants a community to carry with them as they go on. Words of hope, words of encouragement and words of caution for the journey ahead.

As Moses comes to the end of his speech, he offers “all of Israel” – the people of God – a promise and he issues a commandment. First the promise. “The LORD your God will make you abundantly prosperous” and will take delight in prospering you.

Think of it. God promising to prosper the people of God. What do you suppose God's prospering looks like? I think when God prospers a people, they grow, they thrive, they

experience the abundance of God's Shalom. When God prospers a people, they are vital, healthy, thriving communities. When God prospers a people they live with a deep confidence that they are in the hands of a faithful God and they live differently.

Who are the people God prospers? Moses tells us they are the ones who turn to God with all their heart and with all their soul.

That's the commandment Moses gives at the end of his last words. "Turn to God with all your heart and with all your soul." What he meant was turn to God with the center of your understanding for to the ancient Israelites the heart was so much more than simply a place of feeling. The heart was the place of deep understanding. Moses was saying, "From the core of you, from the center of your being, turn to God." But there's more to that commandment. Moses added, "and with all your soul." The Hebrew word for soul is the same word as the Hebrew word for throat. Think of it—Moses was saying to the people he had journeyed with, the people he loved, "Turn to God with all your hunger and all your thirst." Turn to God with your deepest needs and God will delight in prospering you.

To those assembled on the far side of the Jordan, to "all of Israel", Moses then adds, "It's not too hard for you. It's not too far away. It's in your mouth and in your heart." He's saying, "You know this. You can do this. You can turn to God with all of you—your hunger, your thirst, your deepest needs, your strongest love. You have already done it. It's already a part of you."

Like those standing on the plain beyond the Jordan, like those leaning forward to catch Moses' words, we, too, are preparing to enter new territory; we, too, are standing at a threshold; we, too, are facing a new life together. I can imagine that like those standing within earshot of Moses, we, too, are experiencing a host of feelings—excitement, relief, apprehension, joy at just being in this moment together, and some fear about what the future might bring. Maybe even a little sadness. New beginnings are like that—they stir up a host of feelings.

Like those standing on the plain beyond the Jordan, we might well ask, "How shall we live in this new land we are about to enter?"

Remember what Moses said to the people standing on that plain. "Surely this commandment is not too hard for you, nor is it too far away. It is not in heaven; neither is it beyond the sea. No the word is very near to you; it is in your mouth and in your heart." That turning to God was already part of them. It was planted deep in their memory.

As we stand at this threshold, let us take a moment to remember the times we have turned to God with all of our heart and all of our soul.

Remembering the times we, as individuals and as a community, have turned to the LORD our God with all that is in us, let us live in this new land we are about to enter trusting in the hope of God's shalom, trusting in the promise of God.

“How shall we live in this new land?”

Let us live generously turning to and trusting God who delights in prospering us.