

Thankful for Thresholds

Exodus 17:1-7 & Luke 9:57-62

My aunt has a dog named Cody, a standard white standard poodle, who is a service animal. Cody is excellent at being a calming presence for the military men and women at the air force bases in the panhandle of Florida. He can walk into a room and sit with a calmness that helps people going through traumas you cannot imagine. However, Cody sometimes has a problem crossing thresholds. If he is going from one room to another and the flooring changes, he sometimes cannot walk across the threshold to the new flooring. It is amazing to watch. He will just freeze. My aunt has learned that if he turns around and goes across the threshold backward he can do it. I have learned from Cody that thresholds can be difficult.

Now I am not really talking about thresholds in doorways. I am more talking about what thresholds represent. Moving from one place to another. Another name for a threshold is liminal space. It is the space between where you have been and where you are going. The Israelites understood this concept and revealed how hard it is to be in liminal space, or to cross a threshold, in our first scripture today. Moses is leading the Israelite people from slavery to freedom. As they wander in the wilderness, they start to question how they will have their basic needs met. Previously they had asked about food and were assured there would be manna and quail daily. Now, they are asking about water. Why? Because as Juliana Claassens, Professor of Old Testament at the University of Stellenbosch in Stellenbosch, South Africa reminds us in her commentary on Exodus 17:1-7 at WorkingPreacher.org, the wilderness is a space of depravity where people's most basic needs are not being met.

Guess what it feels like is happening in liminal space, when crossing a new threshold? It often feels like a person has no idea how basic needs are going to be met. It feels like the wilderness. So often we do not know how we will get where we are going. What we know is that it was better for the Israelites to be free than to be slaves. However, it was scary to make their way to freedom. This is why the Israelites journey through the wilderness is their story of salvation. It is a story of having faith to move to a new way of being, a new possibility, a new way of life. And it is not easy.

We all have times in our lives when we cross thresholds. These can be wonderful gifts like starting a new relationship, getting married, having a child, buying your first house, getting a promotion at work, feeling a call in your life to follow the Lord, the list goes on and on. And then there are thresholds that are hard to cross. Thresholds like the death of a loved one, terminal illnesses, loss of jobs, divorce, overcoming addictions, getting out of abusive relationships, starting therapy, getting treatment for a mental illness, setting boundaries in relationships, asking for help, financial instability, and even recovering from a global pandemic. And again the list goes on. I have to tell you that the more I think about all of the thresholds in our lives, the more I think Cody might have the right idea. Just turn around, walk backward and pray that someone will guide you.

Except, Jesus has something to say about that idea. In the scripture from Luke, he is calling people to follow him. He is inviting people to cross a threshold in their lives. What is this threshold? It is to embrace new life. To embrace God's love. It is to embrace a new way of being. After all, that is what a threshold really is. It is about journeying to a new way of living. Even negative thresholds lead to health and life, including death and terminal illnesses. They

lead to new life, eternal life with God. When he calls the people, the ones he calls are trying so hard to turn around and back up to the threshold. They are trying to hold on to what they know, so they do not have to experience the loss that comes before new life. They are trying to avoid that sense of not knowing that every threshold brings. And Jesus tells them that new life with the Lord does not work like that. It takes faith, it takes trust, it takes leaping. Because with each new threshold what we bring is everything that has shaped up. We bring our history and the history of those around us. We bring gifts we have learned. And we call upon all of them to move forward.

We do it as individual people in life. We do it when we answer the call of the Lord. When we take the first step of believing in Christ and the blessings of God. We do it when we are willing to let go of shame and guilt. And sometimes we do it as groups of people. What I have known for the past few years is that Trinity UMC has been crossing a threshold. We have had to figure out a new way to be the church after experiencing loss of people through moves, life changes, and deaths. Yet, we are doing it. We are moving forward with God. We are answering the call of Christ. It has not been easy. Some have chosen to turn around and go a different direction. Yet, I can tell you that life is happening here. New possibilities are happening daily. It has not been an easy journey. Yet, we were never promised easy. What we were promised is new life in Christ, we just have to cross some thresholds to get there.

So, my prayer this day is if you are facing a threshold, may you have the strength and grace to keep going and cross it. May you see the new life on the other side. May you trust God in the process. And if you feel like being like Cody and backing your way through, you are not alone. Sometimes we will look back. We will remember and give thanks for the past. But, we also get to give thanks for the future, for the new life promised by Christ. Thank you God for thresholds, now we just ask you to help us cross them with you. Amen.