

WD For January 4, 2021

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“Into the Unknown”

Well, here we are. The first devotion of 2021. I hope you had a blessed Christmas with your loved ones. I can imagine many of us are ready for the lingering things of 2020 to go away. And eventually they will. The vaccines for Covid are being distributed. Infection rates will drop. We will carry on into a new year that will be full of new unknowns. We don't always know how things will turn out in this next year but we charge in with fireworks, ball-drops, and new hope. And why not? We never know what kinds of blessings God will bring each year.

This is sort of how the Israelites left Egypt—excited, victorious, and happy. But once they are confronted with the unfamiliar and difficult life of the desert they are having second thoughts. I've picked a reading from Exodus 16:6-8 for today. The Israelites are only into their second month after leaving Egypt; the excitement has waned, the food they brought with them has run out and they are beginning to wonder what they have gotten themselves into.

Vs 6—So Moses and Aaron said to all the Israelites, “In the evening you will know that it was the LORD who brought you out of Egypt, ⁷ and in the morning you will see the glory of the LORD, because he has heard your grumbling against him. Who are we, that you should grumble against us?” ⁸ Moses also said, “You will know that it was the LORD when he gives you meat to eat in the evening and all the bread you want in the morning, because he has heard your grumbling against him. Who are we? You are not grumbling against us, but against the LORD.”

The desert did not grow food. Most did not dwell there for obvious reasons and yet Moses was leading the Israelites straight into it via Mt. Sinai. By this point Parents are anxious for the well-being of their children just like many parents have been last year. The people's stomachs are grumbling and so are they... against God and Moses. They have no idea what's coming next but they are beginning to wonder if they might die from hunger. And they are getting angry.

Truth is we never know what's coming next. Mom has said more than once that if she knew back when the treatments started what she knows now she may not have chosen the treatments. “Maybe we can just skip the chemo and go right to the recovery.” Wouldn't that be nice. Likewise, I've heard from another good friend who had major heart surgery last year say that he wouldn't have done it now that he knows what he's been through. Sometimes its better to not know what's next. Especially when the recovery is slow or the outcome is not what we imagined. All we have are the skills and experience of doctors to help us through it.

On the other hand, the unknown holds a fascination to it. It is a mystery to be solved. Historically, when people traveled the oceans in sailing vessels the “new world” was discovered and American came to be. The unknown was a cause for adventure. The unknown is also a course for learning. The moon was unknown but along the way to getting there we expanded our learning in a multitude of things by pushing our limits. We are doing so again as humanity strives to get to Mars. The unknown has magnetism.

The unknown for the Israelites was all of the above. They imagined the Promised Land to be a walk in the park rather than a walk in the desert. If they would have known how hard life in the desert would be, they might not have left Egypt. They didn't know what was ahead but the Lord would patiently show them the way and along the way remind the Israelites who He was. He

supplied the manna and the quail each day in the wilderness and He never left them day or night. It was also an adventure where something new was learned, namely that they could depend on Yahweh each day for food and protection. Slowly, and yes painfully, they traveled 40 years in the wilderness unlearning what they had in Egypt and discovering what it meant to be a people of God.

I would submit to you that each year works very similarly with us. We often have to unlearn some bad habits from the previous year and be reminded that we are God's people. We make our resolutions and think about how we could do better. That's all good. It's also good that some familiar things give way to new things, new surprises, new ways to grow, new experiences that reshape us and make us who we are. And with each one an opportunity to know the Lord more fully. And let us also remember, that the same Lord who led the Israelites in the wilderness remains with us day and night in this new year too. For the Israelites it was about the journey to the Promised Land that made the nation strong enough to enter the Promised Land.

There are lots of unknowns ahead frankly. And yet we always begin in hope for something better. Will we see them as an adventure or with fear? Will we find new joys or old anxieties? Will we gain wisdom or do something foolish? Who knows? All I invite you to do in the beginning of this year is to trust in the One who has made Himself known to us. We know Him from His Word and by coming into the flesh and dying for our sins. And remember "He is the same yesterday, today, and tomorrow" (Heb 13:8) which means Jesus is the one constant thing in a world of unknowns. I encourage to take the time to get to know the One traveling with you this year.

The Lord bless you and keep you. The Lord make His face shine on you and be gracious to you. The Lord look on you with His favor and give you His peace in Jesus for the new year.

Pastor Matthew Woods
John 3:30