

*“...explore the land of Canaan which I am giving to the Israelites.”*

*(Numbers 13:2)*

Beloved

Eleven months after gaining their freedom from Pharaoh, eleven months of enjoying bread from heaven and water from rocks, the children of Israel arrive at the door to a land which flows with milk and honey. Just as God had promised. There they stood looking over the Promised Land. It was theirs. Instead of running to claim their homestead, they complain. “There are enemies in there. With fortifications.” “We want to go back to Egypt.” “We want to go back to the way it was.” “This land is full of giants we cannot overcome.”

Angered, God sent the Israelites back into the desert for forty years. The generation which had doubted God would pass away and never inherit the Promised Land. And Moses who had led them, who had met with God on their behalf, was silent. What if Moses had stood his ground and said, “God gave us this land, it is ours, and we are going to cross the river, already.”

Here we stand. Watching a world react to a Pandemic. Watching people march for justice. Watching people riot. Watching and wondering what have we walked into. Watching our world change. Wondering if we can go back to the way it was. The way it was - was comfortable, we understood it, we didn't have to question ourselves or others, we were in control - not a virus. The way it was when we thought we knew what was coming down the path. Now we are facing giants of fear. Giants of anger. Giants of unsafety. Giants of unknown strength. Giants we can't figure out. Giants which tell us to wear masks, which take our temperature, which tell us where we can go and how many can gather in one place. We are confused, this is new, different, and not our idea. We are scared, we are unsure, we are angry – and we are not going to take it anymore.

One of the giants we face today is Coronavirus. We don't understand it. We can't even recognize it; we fear a sneak attack. It has disrupted our society, our economy, our mental health as well as our physical health. Even if it is not real, even if it is a political ploy, if it is manmade or natural over 18 million have been affected, well over half a million have died just from Covid19, whatever it is. Lives, families, communities - changed forever.

Some of the giant's off springs are the mandates, the physical distancing, the mask, the fear, the ever changing list of symptoms and procedures. We feel rebellious, why, the mask is hot, uncomfortable, unbecoming and not my idea of a good time. You want me to wear a mask, or limit my comings and goings; fine, I won't go into your store, attend your meeting, enter your church.

Here we stand, it's a new day, a new future, we can stand on the river bank and refuse to continue. Or we can say, I can handle this. This virus, these mandates, this fear cannot stop me from following God, from being church, from reflecting the love of God. I will love others and protect the vulnerable. I will use my gifts, my energy, my love to be a part of recreating church, the Body of Christ, so it can be viable in this new world. I won't return to slavery in Egypt. I will ask God for strength and vision to go forth and serve God in a new way. I will step forward and offer myself as a leader as we forge a new trail as church in our community and in our world.

The choice is ours. We are faced with a big unknown. We either stand here unmoving, wander around for the rest of our lives and go nowhere, or we move forward. We blaze a trail. We envision new ways to be church. We come together as church, gather with those we have come to love, lift our voices and praise God who has brought us this far, God who has promised to be with us, no matter what giants we face - real or imagined, God whose Spirit strengthens us for the journey

We have been sent to be salt and light to the world, to reflect the love of God. We have been sent to cross the river and enter a new land. Let's go, already.

I bid you peace

*Pastor Tonia*