

Get It dOne through Faithfulness

Deuteronomy 8:1-10

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I loved reading books to our boys when they were little. In part because it was one of the few things they'd actually sit still for. And while we read a lot of different books, the Little Critter series by Mercer Mayer was one of their favorites. They loved the characters, the illustrations. The stories were fun and funny. But what they loved best about the series is that there was a mouse on every page. Sometimes the mouse was in plain sight. Sometimes the mouse was hidden. But woe unto me if I ever dared turn the page before we found the mouse!

Today we're beginning a new message series entitled Get It dONE. For the next six weeks we're going to celebrate our past, our present and our future as a church. And no matter what part of the story we explore, we're going to find God on every page. Sometimes in plain sight and sometimes in hidden ways. God's faithfulness, so often embodied by the faithfulness of the members of this congregation, is the subplot that runs through our story. And we're celebrating God's faithfulness in the past because that is what gives us the confidence to boldly respond to God's call to move into the future, in particular into the next phase of our campus transformation.

Our Scripture reading today is taken from the eighth chapter of the book of Deuteronomy. Before I read it, let me set the context. When God set the Israelites free from their slavery in Egypt he led them through the wilderness for 40 years, not because the Promised Land was so far away, but because the Israelites had a long way to go in learning to be faithful to and dependent upon God.

In today's reading the Israelites are preparing to cross the Jordan River, moving out of the wilderness and into the Promised Land. And in these verses Moses is reminding the people of how faithful God had been to them in those 40 years of wilderness wandering and calls them to faithfulness as they move into a new

future. Let's listen:

¹ [Moses said] "Be careful to obey all the commands I am giving you today. Then you will live and multiply, and you will enter and occupy the land the LORD swore to give your ancestors. ² Remember how the LORD your God led you through the wilderness for these forty years, humbling you and honing your character, and to find out whether or not you would obey his commands.

³ Yes, he humbled you by letting you go hungry and then feeding you with manna, a food previously unknown to you and your ancestors. He did it to teach you that people do not live by bread alone; rather, we live by every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD. ⁴ For all these forty years your clothes didn't wear out, and your feet didn't blister or swell. ⁵ Think about it: Just as a parent disciplines a child, the LORD your God disciplines you for your own good.

⁶ "So obey the commands of the LORD your God by walking in his ways and honoring him. ⁷ For the LORD your God is bringing you into a good land of flowing streams and pools of water, with fountains and springs that gush out in the valleys and hills. ⁸ It is a land of wheat and barley; of grapevines, fig trees, and pomegranates; of olive oil and honey. ⁹ It is a land where food is plentiful and nothing is lacking. It is a land where iron is as common as stone, and copper is abundant in the hills. ¹⁰ When you have eaten your fill, be sure to praise the LORD your God for the good land he has given you.

This is the Word of God for the people of God. Thanks be to God.

Wandering through the wilderness had not been an easy experience for the Israelites, but Moses put it all into context for them. Their hardship made them utterly dependent upon God for survival. And God proved faithful. God fed them, clothed them and protected them. Now they were about to enter a land of great abundance. While that was a gift, it also posed a real danger. It would be all too easy for the Israelites to become self-reliant and self-satisfied in this new land. The people would be tempted to forget God, thinking that they no longer needed God. But Moses warned them in advance against it. For 40 years God had been faithful, teaching the Israelites to depend on God, and worship, praise and thank God. And because God had been faithful, Moses called the Israelites to be faithful in this next chapter of their story.

Friends, our journey hasn't always been easy either. But God has been amazingly faithful. And throughout the history of God's people, we learn that tough times plus God's faithfulness equals a people prepared for the future. And that's our story, too.

Remember when we awoke to the reality that we were in debt to the tune of \$5 million? It was a hole so deep I wasn't sure we'd ever get out of it. But we did. By God's faithfulness expressed through your generosity during the worst economy in modern history, the *No Debt Know Mission* campaign set us free from debt so that we could be free to engage in more of God's mission.

And then we began to dream, to discern a new vision for who God was calling us to be. And after months of study and prayer we heard God's call to be "the connecting church," called to connect with God, with one another, and with our neighbors around the corner and around the globe.

And at the same time, we began to hear God's call to become a more inclusive congregation, to stand up with and for our gay and lesbian brothers and sisters. It wasn't without conflict or cost, but it was certainly the right thing to do.

And as we considered further what it means to be the connecting church, we began to consider the implications for our physical campus. We realized that not only were our facilities in need of significant repair, but that being in two separate buildings was keeping us disconnected. And so we launched the One Church campaign to help fund the first phase of our campus transformation. And once again, God was so faithful through your generosity. The completion of that first phase again exceeded all expectations.

And along the way we packed millions of meals for starving children around the world, as well as provided food, clothing and dental care to people in our own community. We've nurtured the faith of thousands of children and their families and launched students into the world to be ministry leaders. We've enjoyed some of the most moving worship services imaginable. We've built a staff of incredibly gifted, highly collaborative staff who love one another and give their all for the sake of this ministry. And during this pandemic...we haven't just survived. We've thrived. We've connected with people around the world who will probably never set foot on our campus, but who need the hope and encouragement of the Gospel.

God's faithfulness is written on every page of our

story. Maybe we couldn't always tell where it was along the way, or who we were becoming, but trust me when I say that we are the connecting church that we dreamed we would be. The connecting church that God called us to be so many years ago. Praise God for that.

So, knowing that, knowing that we are who we are and that God is not done with us yet, we are called to press ahead, over this new mountain in the Get It dONE campaign to complete this physical representation of God's spiritual dream for our community. Here's what this future that we're being called to looks like: (*video*)

The story that God has written through us is truly amazing, isn't it? And God isn't done writing it.

I would imagine that as the Israelites stood at the threshold of the Promised Land they had some apprehensions. There were enemies and obstacles and unknowns in this new land. Moving into this new land would require courage and sacrifice and lots of trust. But I suspect that God's faithfulness in their past provided what they needed to step into the next chapter of God's story, the story that God was writing in their lives.

And I would suggest to you that the same thing holds true for us. Stepping into this next chapter of our story will require courage and sacrifice and lots of trust. But God's remarkable faithfulness in our past provides all we need to step into the next chapter of the story God is writing in our lives.

In the coming weeks we're going to talk about the impact that Phase Two of our campus transformation is going to have and how it's going to equip us to move more effectively into the future and fulfill the vision that God has given us. And we'll be talking about the Get It dONE campaign that will provide the needed resources to make it all possible.

But for now I want to challenge you to do two things. First, start praying now, asking the Holy Spirit to help you to discern how you are being called to respond to this next chapter in our life together. Second, let's do what Moses told the Israelites to do. In light of God's remarkable faithfulness, let's express our thanks and praise to the One who is writing a new story in us, Prince of Peace, the Connecting Church. Spend some time each day this week thinking about how you've been blessed through this ministry, how you've gotten more deeply connected to God, to one another in the Body of Christ, and to the world around you. There's so much to be thankful for, because God has been so very faithful. Let's pray.