
A Deep Bow of Gratitude...

Among my favorite passages from the Hebrew Bible is Joshua 3:

Early in the morning Joshua rose and set out from Shittim with all the Israelites, and they came to the Jordan. They camped there before crossing over. At the end of three days the officers went through the camp and commanded the people, "When you see the ark of the covenant of the Lord your God being carried by the levitical priests, then you shall set out from your place. Follow it, so that you may know the way you should go, for you have not passed this way before." (Joshua 3:1-4)

"For you have not passed this way before..." We have indeed been in new terrain, crossing a metaphorical Jordan River in this season of Covid-19. Indeed, perhaps the word "liminal" is instructive. In anthropology, for example, liminality is the quality of *ambiguity or disorientation* that occurs in the middle stage of a rite of passage, when we have not yet begun the transition across the "river." We ask what sustains us as we cross over; what spiritual treasures do we carry with us; and what do we leave behind? Recently we celebrated "Good Shepherd Sunday" at the Cathedral, and we were reminded that *we are not alone, no matter the nature of our transitions*. Like the people of Israel in Joshua, we are on a journey less Odyssean than Abrahamic. We do not know where this will lead us, yet hope, and this beloved community of grace and hospitality, sustains us.

During any liminal stage, participants "stand at the threshold" between their previous way of structuring their identity, time, or community, and a new way, which remains open. As I write this, Vicky and I are in our own time of transition. This past Sunday was my final day as a member of the Cathedral clergy staff after some 18 years among you. I am so very grateful to have been on the journey with you all. I will continue to see clients at the Cathedral Counseling center and my teaching duties at Columbia Seminary. We look forward to more time with our family in Montana and our twin grandchildren, Jack and Alice, and our Atlanta family, including granddaughter Sophia. I give thanks for the good work I am called to do. Freud referred to counseling as "a cure through love." Perhaps this is what another author meant, when he wrote this during a time similar to ours:

"Age has no reality except in the physical world. The essence of a human being is resistant to the passage of time. ...Think of love as a state of grace, not the means to anything, but the alpha and omega...An end in itself."
~ Gabriel Garcia Marquez (Love in the Time of Cholera)

Adapting to the "new normal" can be a time to discover something new about our call to be fully present to ourselves, and to one another. Erik Erickson reminds us that the penultimate stage of human development is "Generativity vs. Stagnation." Vicky and I look forward to finding new forms of generativity as our family grows. *We have not passed this way before*. As Wendell Berry suggests in this lovely poem:

*Geese appear high over us,
pass, and the sky closes. Abandon,
as in love or sleep, holds
them to their way, clear
in the ancient faith: what we need
is here. And we pray, not
for new earth or heaven, but to be
quiet in heart, and in eye,
clear. What we need is here.*

I give a deep bow of gratitude for each of you, and for my beloved Cathedral colleagues down through the years, some of whom are no longer among us. It has been an honor and privilege to serve among you and with you in the ministries we have shared. Yes, we have not passed this way before... but *what we need is here*. Blessings and Godspeed!

Bill Harkins

© *The Cathedral of St. Philip*. All rights reserved.