

My mom will be the first one to tell you that of all her kids, I was the one that hated leaving home when I was little the most. It's undeniable that all three of us are intensely introverted and trend towards being homebodies, content to home, reading our books, and snuggling our respective pets than out and about having to people. However, when I was little, Jenn and Kristin couldn't hold a candle to my desire to just be home. There are stories within my family that are now infamous about my dislike of sleeping anywhere other than my own bed, knowing my family is right down the hall.

There was the slumber party at one of my friend's houses, who lived literally four houses down from us, where I woke up at two in the morning with a stomachache, something that my older self now immediately realizes is a key sign that my anxiety is kicking, but which at the time I assumed meant I was getting sick, resulting in my mom heading down the road to get me in the middle of the night. Shockingly enough, I was completely fine when I woke up, and ready for our trip to the Detroit Zoo.

There were the two summers during middle school that it seemed like it would be fun for me and my best friend from church to try out church camp, a few hours Up North, spending the week outside, running around, swimming, and making s'mores. I will not divulge the content of the postcards that I sent home, some of which my mom still has, because they

were blindingly embarrassing. Sad, little, tween laments that I wasn't just at home enjoying the summer with my family. When I got to seminary and heard over and over my fellow classmates extol how their experiences at camp were vital to discerning their call to ministry, I ducked my head, not wanting to admit that if my call to ministry was based upon my enjoyment of camp then I was absolutely in the wrong place.

So...you can imagine my mom's surprise when the time came for me to decide where I was going to college and my immediate instinct was 7 hours and 500 miles away. There can be no doubt that Gettysburg was already a second home to me, having watched Kristin love her time there, but when my mom dropped me off for freshman year, two weeks early for band camp, she was expecting a tearful, difficult separation. Now for sure, I cried, but my mom will hands down tell you that she remembers sending me off to Schmucker Hall for my first session of camp, and I looked back over my shoulder with a smile and a wave and I was...completely good. I walked into that next phase of life content, leaving my poor mom to make the long drive home with her own lament and Jenn's shoulder there to cry on.

It didn't make sense, my complete and total, a-ok-ness with heading off into the great unknown of college, but that's what I did, and you can imagine for my mom, even seeing the confidence with which I walked off,

she was left to wonder if I was ready, if I would truly be ok, if it wouldn't all fall apart when I got back to my dorm that night, or once the reality of truly being *away from home* sank in, and I adjusted to the reality that this was my new reality, my new home away from home. Was I prepared to live in my new land...a question that Moses would whole-heartedly sympathize with my mom agonizing over.

Our first lesson finds the Israelites on the brink of a massive transition. Think of it as sending your kids to their first day of preschool, high school, college, or the first time you got the car keys on your own for the first time, or started a new job. They are on the cusp on a complete change in their situation. For forty years they have been wandering in the wilderness, learning what it is to be God's people, fully freed and liberated from the bonds of slavery. For forty years there has been manna and quails and pillars of fire and *Moses* to lead them. And now...the Promised Land is in sight, they are near the border, and everything is about to change.

From this point on, they will no longer be a wilderness people, they won't be nomads, but people with a home, a land. They won't be *anticipating* a promise anymore, the promise will be fulfilled, which means they have to live up to their side of the covenant. They will have to provide for themselves, put down roots, harvest their own crops. They will have to

live in and amongst strangers, no longer just within their isolated communities, they will have to find their niche and settle in. And...Moses will no longer be with them. Unfair as it may seem to be, Moses has known for a long time that he will not enter into the Promised Land with God's people, he will be like my mom, sending them off into the great unknown, hoping and praying that he has prepared them adequately, and that is what we hear in our lesson, the final words of encouragement of an anxious parent about to hand the keys over, about to watch their kids take their first steps. Moses knows he only has a little longer to make sure they are as prepared as they could ever possibly be until it's not up to him anymore.

Moses lays out the reality in pretty clear terms for the people, they have two choices before them, life and prosperity or death and adversity. Up until this point the path has been laid out before them and they've just had to follow, admittedly with some grumbling along the way, but still, straight on to the Promised Land. Now though...well now their path is going to be up to them. They can stay the course of who they have been, God's people, committed, covenanted to God, following God's commandments and choosing love and life over all else, or they can be led astray by the temptations that will come with entering the land. They are about to be surrounded by people who worship differently than them, idols that will be

alluring, and a world that will call them to new and different allegiances.

Moses says the choice is theirs. They can stay with God or they can choose otherwise. If they follow along with the world they're moving into, it doesn't mean that God is going to smite them down, it just means that, life is going to be harder, living in a different community, following different laws, fighting battles that might not have been theirs. Choosing to go that way is going to lead to difficulty, but ultimately, the choice *is* theirs to make. It's up to them if they choose to stay in community or go their own ways. God isn't going to force them, Moses isn't going to be their to lead them anymore. In short, it's time to grow up, Peter Pan.

We are no strangers to these moments, these inflection points where we decide who we're going to be, what path we're going to choose. It could have been our parents saying, you can party in college or you can study, you can go the speed limit or pay your own insurance. Or it could be moments that are a little less clear cut, a little more about identity and our relationship with our faith, it's just sometimes we try not to think about them that way. I mean when we think about it, we aren't all that different from the Israelites. We know the choices God has laid before us, the calling God has given us. We know that God calls us to moments of deep love, compassion, and forgiveness. We know that God calls us to radical acts of justice and equity

for all of our siblings. We know that God calls us to honor one another's hearts and lives, love them with the same love God loves us. We know that God calls us to a one on one relationship with our faith, not distracted by idol worship and split allegiances. We *know* this, and just like the Israelites, everyday we are faced with, "See, I have set before you today life and prosperity, death and adversity."

When faced with that friend or family member that has no problem with casual statements that cross the line of racism, homophobia, or any kind of prejudice, even when faced with our own internal thoughts of such things, we choose, do I say something? Do I speak up and call out what we know is wrong? Do I seek to educate myself so that I can love my sibling better? Or do I decide that how I feel about others is separate from my faith and ignore that whole love others as yourself thing?

When faced with the pull, the tug of this world that shows us images of growth, wealth, and prosperity, the tug to get ahead by any means, do we remember that God didn't set before us a faith which praises the best, brightest and greatest or do we say, well, but I bet God wouldn't mind if I had a little bit more than others, after all I earned it and if they didn't, well then, tough. Maybe I earned these blessings and they didn't. When asked if

we will worship at the feet of our money, we think we can bow there and bow before the Lord our God.

When faced with headlines and the constant din of the news, we asked the proverbial question of what do we worship? Do we worship at the feet of weapons of violence and destruction, mindsets of cynicism and despair, at the right to say we're better than you because of who we are, where we were born, what we have, or what color our skin is or do we remember that we are called to worship God and God alone, and anything that we place above that, anything that we place above each of our siblings' lives is nothing short of the idolatry that Moses warned the people about.

We live our lives thinking so often that we can do both. We can say and think the awful things we are inclined to and then come and worship God on Sunday like all is well. We can judge others for who they are, how they look, what they have, how they present themselves and then praise God for creating and loving all people. We can hate and then give thanks that God loves us. We think we can do both, and yet, the age old words of Robert Frost resound...two roads diverge in the wood... The one less traveled by is the harder road, guiding us to God, love, and grace for all. The easier road is filled with all those promises of the world. Two paths lie before us today, which one will make all the difference? **AMEN!!!**