

There is a story amongst folks at my first call that is still infamous. If you were to ask any of my former youth group parents about the Maize Quest incident, they would all immediately burst out laughing and then sufficiently and wholly roast me for what was just plain foolishness on my part. So let's set some context here, we were taking the youth group to the local corn maze. It was this massive complex with a huge main maze and then tons of tiny ones to navigate. So we get ready to carpool and since I'm the pastor I declare that I'll lead. Doesn't matter that I'd only been there once, I knew what I was doing, plus...I had GPS, this was no problem.

What proceeded was a 45 minute drive down single lane roads where one of my folks cars almost got stuck because a country lane and a Ford Expedition do not mix. Tree branches were hanging so low over us they were scrapping the roof, and I truly thought we were never going to get there. Once we arrived the incredulity began, because you see, if you just drove like twenty minutes outside of town, on the *main road*, and then turned right, we would have gotten there simple and easy—with *one* turn. I made the mistake of saying, "I put it in my GPS!" and they all laughed and said, yeah never put this address in there, it doesn't know where it's going. I felt so foolish, but at the same time recognized this could have been solved easily by saying I wasn't going to be the lead car. I wasn't the local and I

didn't have to pave the way. And my folks realized once they saw the direction we were going they should have called me and been like, umm, we're turning around, follow us, and we'll get there just fine. It was a failure of communication without a doubt, but it was also a failure to ask for or offer help, and it led us to our own desert experience.

Our first lesson feels a bit like Oprah took over and was just handing out angry feelings all over the place. You get some anger and you get some anger and *you* get some anger. The Israelites are frustrated, which makes God frustrated, which makes Moses frustrated, and even after we find a solution, Joshua gets frustrated, *and* if we went on in the chapter we'd find out Miriam and Aaron are also frustrated. There is just a lot of angst spilling out all over the place, and it's left Moses in a pretty dark place.

We are in year *two* of the wilderness wandering. Imagine how angsty everyone would be if they knew they had 38 more years of this. Anyway, year two and we are just *obsessed* with our feelings about food. There seems to be a little contingent amongst the Israelites, the rabble as it were, who are sowing discontent amongst the crowds. Remember all the food we had in Egypt? The fish, the cucumbers, the melons, it was a veritable buffet of food options and we got it all for *nothing*. Ah the beauty of rose-colored glasses on hindsight. For nothing but your physical labor, mental trauma

and abuse, and ya know, your freedom, but sure, totally for nothing. God has been providing them with manna and it's just not cutting it. You can apparently only eat so many complimentary bread baskets before you're ready for the main meal.

The people are weeping and bemoaning and it just ticks God off. Everything God has provided, plus, that little thing of freeing them from slavery, and it's not enough, and so God is angry and it is just Moses' last straw. Moses goes to God and is like, "What have *I* done that has made you lay all of this at my feet?! While you're raining manna down, you aren't giving me shoulders of steel to carry this burden!" I mean, God bless Moses, because he just doesn't hold back, he pretty much rips into God saying the Israelites are not his children, they're God's! He didn't sign on to be a babysitter or a wet nurse, if they're God's children, God can take care of them. He's just done. He can't do this alone. It's all too much and too heavy and he doesn't want to do it anymore. Laying the groundwork for the prophets who will come after him, Elijah, Jonah, Job, Moses asks to die. That is how broken down he is. If he isn't going to get any help, then he is going to just say he's done.

It's devastating really. This man who didn't want this job in the first place and at every turn, things just get harder. And so he pleads for a

solution, he asks for help, because he needs it, and thankfully, God has a solution. God has Moses gather 70 elders of the people and they are bestowed with the Holy Spirit to share the burden and blessing of leadership. Moses doesn't have to do this alone anymore. He can delegate, the responsibility gets diffused amongst many, and suddenly that burden he was carrying feels a bit lighter, but of course it can't all just be simple and easy from there, right?

Very quickly after, Joshua comes up to Moses angsty and worried because two of the elders are *still* prophesying and doing holy things. Joshua feels threatened on Moses' behalf. If they run around slinging their power everything, something is going to get out of hand!! And Moses is just like, dude, chill...God gave them the Spirit, I *asked* for help, let them help. Other people sharing the burden doesn't threaten me. Other people sharing the burden makes things better. Let them be. It's not just about me, but about all of us and how we're going to get through this together.

For every person in this passage, there is a lesson about life in community. For the Israelites, the lesson that stirring up a faction and lambasting your leader does nothing but sow discontent and makes everyone's life harder. They failed to see how they were impacting Moses as a human being, as one of them, not just as some put on a pedestal leader.

For Moses, the lesson that he had to ask for help. He had to open his heart and be honest and say, I cannot do this. For God, the lesson, once again, that humanity is messy, and are going to need guidance. For Joshua, the lesson that true leadership means accepting the help, the talents, the abilities of others and welcoming them into the fold without seeing that as a diminishment of your own place in the community. All of these are nothing short of lessons on how to live together in community and in a world rife with individualism and go it alone attitudes, it is a lesson we need more than ever because far too often we feel like one of these groups or all of them.

How many of us when in positions of leadership have tried the Moses route—rocking it out on our own, taking on more than we can handle, and then when it gets to be too much just completely falling apart and lamenting that we can't do it anymore? How many of us have been the Israelites when we're part of a larger crowd—finding that one thing that we just harp on and can't let go of and going all in on those in power because they need to fix *this one thing* or everything is miserable? How many of us have been Joshua—there's finally help and yet then all of the sudden we're jealous because other people bring something to the table that maybe we don't and suddenly doing it on our own didn't seem so bad because then we get all the accolades? And honestly, how many of us have been God—constantly

astounded and amazed that people can take any situation and make it as complicated as possible?

So much of our life as the church is this way, mostly because the church of the 21st century is rooted in the individualistic values and goals of a modern world. You're expected to carry your burdens alone, pull your weight and the weight of ten others, and be the best in all that you do, expecting the appropriate laudatory comments when you succeed. But the church is not the world...or at least it's not supposed to be. We were not meant to carry things alone. That's why we're here together. You can pray and read the Bible all on your own, but you shouldn't be expected to hold the weight of the world and your hearts solo. That's why we have each other. We are not supposed to value one of us more than another, to hold their skills and talents as sacred cows that only they can utilize, but to combine our strengths, our gifts, and steward them in a way that makes life here together as holistically faithful as it can be. None of us is more important than anyone else, and it takes all of us. And if one person's idea works, we shouldn't be bitter that it wasn't ours, but thankful that there are so many of us to make the work lighter. And frankly we shouldn't be here to make things harder for each other, nitpicking about when we had

cucumbers and melons and the coffers were more full. It does nothing but exhaust everyone and make the real kingdom work harder.

If I had let someone else lead, asked for help all those years ago, that trip would have been a lot smoother. God doesn't call us to do life alone, to be the church alone. It takes all of us. And there is absolutely no shame, no judgment in saying, I don't got this today and I need help carrying this because it is way too heavy for me. How many of us are exhausted by trying to be the one with the biggest shoulders, carrying as much as humanly possible so that it makes things easier for someone else, or because frankly we'd rather just do it ourselves so no one else messes it up? Stop. We have to stop trying to do this by ourselves.

How many of you try to bring the groceries in in one load. Each arm laden with as many bags as possible and then you get to the door and have no clue how you're going to get your key in the lock? The work of the church, the work of the kingdom, the life of faith doesn't have to be hefted like fifteen bags of groceries. It's why we have each other. I need you and you need me and each of you needs each other. It's the only way we're going to get through the wilderness. When we do this together, sharing the burden, sharing the joy, sharing the experience, the road home is going to be a lot smoother and the journey way more enjoyable. **AMEN!!!**