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CONCORD
SUNDAY
SCHOOL

LECTIONARY
LESSON 7

SUNDAY,
FEBRUARY 16,
2020

Deuteronomy 30:15-20 NRSV

15 See, I have set before you today life and prosperity, death and adversity. 16 If you obey the commandments of the Lord your God that I am commanding you today, by loving the Lord your God, walking in his ways, and observing his commandments, decrees, and ordinances, then you shall live and become numerous, and the Lord your God will bless you in the land that you are entering to possess. 17 But if your heart turns away and you do not hear, but are led astray to bow down to other gods and serve them, 18 I declare to you today that you shall perish; you shall not live long in the land that you are crossing the Jordan to enter and possess. 19 I call heaven and earth to witness against you today that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Choose life so that you and your descendants may live, 20 loving the Lord your God, obeying him, and holding fast to him; for that means life to you and length of days, so that you may live in the land that the Lord swore to give to your ancestors, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob.

Background

This passage appears in Deuteronomy, a book we have rarely explored together. This part of Deuteronomy is the beginning of Moses' farewell speech to the people. One chapter later, Moses admits that it is his time to move on from leadership and introduces the people to Joshua. We can read this passage as a setup of encouragement. Before Moses leaves the people, he must leave a challenge. He must also leave wisdom.

Today's lesson will focus on the consequence of selfishness.

Read the scripture out loud together.

Discuss with a partner. Can you think of a moment when you encountered someone's selfishness? Was it yours or someone else's? What happened?

What's happening during this passage?

Moses is telling the people a little somethin' somethin' about "life and prosperity, death and adversity." He argues that adherence to the commandments will directly result in blessings. But if one turns away, destruction is the consequence. The people are encouraged to "choose life so that your descendants may live." The way Moses argues this can happen is by "loving the Lord your God, obeying him, and holding fast to him" so that the people may see "the length of days" in the land that was promised to "Abraham, Isaac and Jacob."

What commandments are we encouraged to follow?

1. You shall have no other gods before Me.
2. You shall make no idols.
3. You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain.
4. Keep the Sabbath day holy.
5. Honor your father and your mother.
6. You shall not murder.
7. You shall not commit adultery.
8. You shall not steal.
9. You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.
10. You shall not covet.

How important are these commandments for Moses and the people?

Moses reminds the people that it is important to obey God's commandments. In fact, in the same sentence, he says "obey the commandments" "that I am commanding you" by "observing his commandments." It's clear that Moses wants to emphasize

these guidelines. And in a few verses before the lectionary passage, Moses assures the people that “this commandment is not too hard for you, nor is it too far away”(verse 11).

Why do these commandments matter?

These commandments matter because the community depends on healthy relationships. If you read these commandments, all of these commandments help to guide the matters of a community. Of course, there are the obvious matters. Obviously, murdering, stealing, coveting other people’s belongings, bearing false witness against others can dissolve a fragile community. But there are other commandments that are less obvious to the health of a community. Can you imagine how, for this community of people, making idols might fracture this community? In your own devotional period, check out Exodus 32. What happened there?

What happens when someone acts out of selfishness?

When a community has an established set of agreements, and someone violates those agreements, it can fracture trust. Moses describes these actions as the heart “turning away.” As a matter of practicality, a community of thieves or frequent-fibbers is not one that can withstand the hardships to come. Obeying the commandments is important not just because we should be obedient. It is important because these commandments have an aim of supporting the strength of a given community. When communities identify selfish people, they are more likely to find ways to exclude those people rather than hold those people accountable with love. For example, if someone is frequently stealing from purses, it is more likely that that person will be arrested than asked “do you have what you need at home? Why are you stealing? Do you realize your actions have an impact on others?”

What questions do you still have of this scripture? How will you commit to journeying with this text this week?

Encourage students to highlight parts of the passage that still make them curious. Be sure to check in with them next Sunday about what they’re still curious about.

Connection to Today's World

About a month ago, a little girl named Taylor was captured in a viral video. She ranted about how someone in the classroom had stolen her pink perfect attendance pencil. She lamented and stood firm in her case. After all, "I'm the only one who has one!" Eventually, she found out who stole her pencil, and confronted this person about it. The student who took the pencil said she'd give it back, and then went back on that promise. When telling the story to



her mother, she had expressed great grief and sadness. Her boundary had been violated. Someone took something without asking, and now she was concerned that her personal items might be taken again. Her mother said, "it's just a pencil," but for Taylor, it was more than just a pencil. It was a perfect attendance pencil! It's about the principle of the matter. When someone feels violated, it can be difficult to participate in the larger community.

Journal: Have you ever placed your needs above the needs of your community? Was it selfish, or was it a boundary? How do you discern the difference?

Closing: Sing "Koinonia."

How can I say that I love the Lord
Who I've never ever seen before
And forget to say that I love the one
Who I walk beside each and every day
How can I look upon your face

and ignore God's love, you I must
embrace
You're my brother, you're my sister
and I love you with the love of the Lord

Prayer:

Dear God,

You are good and you have kept us across generations. We are standing on the edge of a power transfer (we hope) as a nation. And though the current president is nothing like the Moses we meet in the Bible, we have to come back to what makes us a community just like the people did back then.

We need to remember what keeps us a community. We need to remember what our commitments are to each other. We need your love as we try to show love to one another. Embolden us and correct us in love.

In Jesus' name we pray,

Amen

Works Cited

@TabGeezy on Instagram, Taylor's Perfect Attendance Pencil.