

Confidence in the Face of Diversity

Think back on the most wonderful gift somebody gave you. The gift might have been a wedding gift, a friendship gift, a birthday gift or a graduation gift. For some of us, it was a birthday gift or a Christmas gift. What was that the most expensive gift you were given? How did you feel when you go the gift? How did you treat that gift?

There is that sense of awe, as you see what the gift is. There can even be a feeling of fear - that feeling you cannot use the gift for fear you might damage it, might break it. For an expensive gift, you might show a lot of respect and care you show when you use the gift.

When I was in college, I remember a student who was given a Monte Carlo as a high school graduation gift. That car did not do the job. So the next year, he was given a Blazer for a high school graduation gift. Still he did not complete high school. Then he was given a Corvette. The Vette did not do the job either. As I recall, the limited edition Corvette he got the next year worked. A car can be a good graduate gift, when it is used to take the young person to a place in life beyond the high school experience. The car can help a person put into use the skills learned in high school, but it can only do that when a person respects the gift enough to use in appropriately.

I wanted the student's parents to adopt me! One car would have worked for me! I figured I would be a much cheaper son. One car would have been plenty for me to graduate.

In the last year, I got two gifts that were not valuable gifts in terms of dollars. The gifts were gifts from the heart and that made them valuable. They were sent to me by relatives of people who passed away. The relatives wanted me to have something special about the person who died. The gifts were so valuable I was not I should even have them. I opened them with a sense of reverence and very gently removed the gift to look at it. The gifts were difficult for me to use. Eventually, I used them, but it was difficult for me to do that.

I am not the only person who has had problems with gifts that were difficult to use. Some people place the unwanted gifts on the shelf or in the storage room, until they can be discarded. I check out the buys on the internet auction service ebay fairly regularly. I find it interesting to see what people are selling and to read why they are selling things. Many times I see pianos or organs for sale. A common explanation given for selling a piano or an organ is that the instrument was a gift from a parent and the instrument was never used. So the expensive gift is auctioned off, at times for a fraction of the new price. That is not respecting the gift either. Not using a gift is not respecting it.

And the other extreme is people who have no appreciation for what they have been given. They use the gifts, but take no care of them. I've seen that with expensive children's toys that were ruined when they were left out in the rain or in the snow bank all winter. At times, that does not stop when the child grows up. Some people take wonderful automobiles, do not service them properly and literally drive them into the ground.

Keeping these thoughts in mind, turn to **Deuteronomy 26. Verses 1 - 3 (KJV)** **And it shall be, when thou [art] come in unto the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee [for] an inheritance, and possessest it, and dwellest therein;** ²**That thou shalt take of the first of all the fruit of the earth, which thou shalt bring of thy land that the LORD thy God giveth thee, and shalt put [it] in a basket, and shalt go unto the place which the LORD thy God shall choose to place his name there.**

³**And thou shalt go unto the priest that shall be in those days, and say unto him, I profess this day unto the LORD thy God, that I am come unto the country which the LORD sware unto our fathers for to give us.**

Two major themes have been identified in the surrounding chapters. Those themes are

remembering history and the consequences of our actions.¹

The people were asked to recite liturgy. This specific liturgy unites future generations to the past. Through this liturgy, children of Israel were reminded that the promised land is a gift. The gift of the promised land is to be celebrated, remembered and used, but not abused.

But the liturgy goes beyond that. The liturgy gave the children of Israel a sense of identity. About this liturgy, Martin Burber says, **“I as an individual feel and profess myself as one who has just come into the land, and, ever time I offer its first fruits, I acknowledge who I am and renew my identity.”**² Through this liturgy, Moses was hoping the people would feel closer to God and would be more motivated to serve the Lord.

We can gain a lot of meaning from the liturgy from our perspective, from looking back. But that eliminates one valuable way of looking at the text. What did the words mean to the people who were listening to Moses?

In verse one, Moses focuses on the future. **When thou [art] come.** The people were not yet in the promised land. Moses concentrates on the future - a time when the children of Israel have conquered³ and occupied the promised land. There is something about looking to the future that helps us live in the present, in the here and the now.

Like the children of Israel, we have the promise of the promised land, a heavenly promised land. A heaven is a gift. The children of Israel had some tough days ahead. There were wildernesses to live in, barren lands to cross, rivers to forge and hostile enemies to defeat. To the children of Israel, the words **when thou [art] come** must have been comforting words of hope and assurance. These words speak of having the promised land as a fact, not just a hope.

Uncertainty abounds. In Canada and the United States, there is a push for society to accept diversity. While some of us like moves toward embracing diversity, the moves are frightening for some of us.

The first encounters with diversity can be scary. We can no longer walk down the streets of towns and cities assuming all those we meet share our perspectives on life, our values, our Christian faith or our ethnic heritage. When we are afraid, because those around us do not love our God, Moses can be heard giving us words from God, words of assurance. **When thou [art] come.**

Proposed legislation has us wondering what society will be like in the coming generations. We are not even sure what families will look like. In the face of uncertainty and a changing world, the words of Moses to the people bring us comfort. **When thou [art] come.**

God has given us salvation. He has given us the future. Eternal life is knowing Jesus. **John 17:3 And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent.** We know Jesus Christ now. In that respect, eternal life starts now for the Christian.

When the gift of salvation is being used and is not setting on a shelf or in the storage, we have confidence in the present and in the future. Those who have confidence in the Lord can face the future without fear. And that is important, if we are to live out our faith in a way that draws people to the Lord.

When we are terrified of our enemies or of those who are different than we are, we react in anger when that is not needed or helpful. People are hurt by our outbursts of anger - outbursts that are due to our own insecurities. At times, we turn toward partisan political activities to calm our

¹Harvey J. Fields. **A Torah Commentary for Our Times.** Vol. 3 (New York: UAHC Press, 1993), 157.

²Cited in Fields. Vol. 3, 160.

³Fields. Vol. 3, 157.

fears.

Fear of those who might hurt us in other churches, in other denominations or in world religions start to evaporate when we understand how secure our future is in Messiah. The fears we have, can evaporate in the presence of Christ's promises.

When thou [art] come. When thou [art] come. These are words of confidence. Moses does not say, "If thou art come in unto the land." He says, "When thou art come."

Moses looks to the future with confidence, because God knows the end from the beginning.⁴ And we are also able to walk into the future with confidence. This is the kind of bravery that helps us understand that diversity can be an opportunity – an opportunity to serve, to assist, to build bridges and to witness.

So as we pray for a new pastor, look for a new pastor, see more and more diversity around us and watch developing trends in society, I encourage you to remember Moses words of assurance **When thou [art] come.** For by being confident in our future, we can be brave enough to love and live for God and to treasure the interactions we have with people of diversity and our sacred service for others.

Prayer:

Lord give us the confidence we need to brave the unknowns with calm, consistent, faithful and loving service and witness. Amen.

⁴Isaiah 46:10 Declaring the end from the beginning.