

## “Trust What’s Here”

Rev. David Gregory

July 10, 2022

5<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost



### Readings

Deuteronomy 30:11-14

from the New Revised Standard Version

Surely, this commandment that I am commanding you today is not too hard for you, nor is it too far away. It is not in heaven, that you should say, “Who will go up to heaven for us and get it for us so that we may hear it and observe it?” Neither is it beyond the sea, that you should say, “Who will cross to the other side of the sea for us and get it for us so that we may hear it and observe it?” No, the word is very near to you; it is in your mouth and in your heart for you to observe.

Richard Rohr

in *Everything Belongs: The Gift of Contemplative Prayer*

Spirituality is about seeing. It’s not about earning or achieving. It’s about relationship rather than results or requirements. Once you see, the rest follows. You don’t need to push the river, because you are in it. The life is lived within us, and we learn how to say yes to that life. If we exist on a level where we can see how “everything belongs,” we can trust the flow and trust the life, the life so large and deep and spacious that it even includes its opposite, death.

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Like most people nowadays, I have some difficulty remembering what life was like before GPS, the global positioning system has become so completely woven into our existence. All you need is a smart phone with a decent signal, and I can know accurately within seven meters 95% of the time, exactly where I am at any given moment on the face of the earth.

When my sons were young, they had a tradition of buying me the latest Rand McNally Road Atlas every year for Christmas, and by the time we were ready to take our summer vacation, we would have studied the maps and charted our route for wherever we were going. It took hours to do. It was entirely two-dimensional. And if there was a need for an alternate route, I had to find it myself (and the only voice talking to me was the one inside my head). GPS is an entirely different way of life. On a Sunday morning, for example, I can type in “UCC church near me,” and immediately have the choices in front of me. When I choose one, I’ll have three different routes ranked by time. A voice will tell me every turn to take, which lane to be in, “go past this light, and at the next one turn right,” or “accident ahead, you’re still on the fastest route.” But it’s not perfect. Sometimes you still have to figure some stuff out.

My favorite GPS story is about a time some years ago in Asbury Park, New Jersey, when Tripp and I were trying to find a Chase Bank. Our GPS took us to a dead end in a woods and said, “Park your car and walk to your destination.” Sometimes you just have to turn it off and remember that there is such a thing as a gut instinct. We don’t always need an external system to tell us where we’re going. There is an internal GPS that we might call intuition, or feeling your way to a destination. It’s a guidance system that is perfectly capable of getting you there. It might take a little longer, but it can be a lot more satisfying and definitely a lot more fun.

The story of the ancient Hebrews at its core is about guidance. An entire race of people enslaved by a powerful empire find their way to freedom, but once they’re safely on the other side of the Red Sea, they don’t know where they’re going. For forty years they wander in the wilderness trying to find the promised land. They are led by a cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. When the cloud starts moving, they start moving. When it stops they stop. They get frustrated. They get bitter. They get angry at Moses and wish they had never left Egypt. That’s when they were given the Law of Moses, the Torah, The Pentateuch, or the first five books of the Old Testament. Today’s scripture reading is from the closing words of that work.

According to the Talmud, the Law of Moses contains 613 commandments in response to the question, “What in the world do we do now?” Over centuries of Judeo-Christian tradition, we humans have become adept at whipping out whichever of those commandments suit us in the moment, while ignoring the rest. Then, of course, we’ve created all the other denominational systems to overlay on top of that, so that we can micro-manage each other into conformity with whatever group we’re part of, all for the purpose of figuring out where in the world we are, and what we should do now.

Every religious system tries to be an external GPS, when right here buried in the closing words of the Books of the Law it says:

Surely, this commandment that I am commanding you today is not too hard for you, nor is it too far away. It is not in heaven, that you should say, “Who will go up to heaven for us and get it for us so that we may hear it and observe it?” Neither is it beyond the sea, that you should say, “Who will cross to the other side of the sea for us and get it for us so that we may hear it and observe it?” No, the word is very near to you; it is in your mouth and in your heart for you to observe.

In other words, “Park your car and walk to your destination.” You know how to get there. You’re not lost. Become practiced in another way of seeing. It’s not that you’ll never need external guidance, but it will always be a surprise to understand all the things you already know.

These ancient guidance documents contained prescriptions that became a way of life for large swaths of humanity. But systems of religious thought, while sometimes helpful, can at other times discourage us from looking within for the answers we seek. Intuition is really a *thing*, but Western culture has often found it far too subjective to be relied upon. The early Christian mystics totally got this, but they were drowned out by the church councils who needed to control the message and mediate it through the power of Christian empire. Contemporary Christian mystics also get this, and they also often get drowned out by the Cristo-theocratic-fascism that we hear about every day.

People cannot be trusted to make the choices we want them to make, so we must take away their rights to privacy and bodily autonomy, and make systematic decisions for them based on some cherry-picking of ancient laws that were never the final authority. There comes a time in every nest when the young birds learn to fly, and when that happens they know instinctively what to do and where to go. And so do we. In the words of one of our contemporary Christian mystics, Richard Rohr, “Spirituality is about seeing. It’s not about earning or achieving. It’s about relationship rather than results or requirements.”

If you ever wonder about all the emphasis placed on meditation and contemplative spirituality these days, consider this: We live in a vibrational universe, and when we quiet our minds and turn within, when that internal vibration (call it Holy Spirit if you like) begins to rise within us, when the external voices are softened, when the noise gets tuned out and we can just listen—JUST listen—there comes another way of knowing, another way of seeing.

As Richard Rohr says:

Once you see, the rest follows. You don’t need to push the river, because you are in it. The life is lived within us, and we learn how to say yes to that life. If we exist on a level where we can see how “everything belongs,” we can trust the flow and trust the life, the life so large and deep and spacious that it even includes its opposite, death.



Painting by N.C. Wyeth  
title unknown

This is, I believe, the essence of the New Reformation, where we stop pushing the river and recognize we’re in it. We let it flow. We drop the oars. We become so practiced in our contemplative journey that we become less and less dependent on external guidance, and we can truly park our cars and walk to our destination.