

# **Sermon**

**24 April 2016**

**West Kirk of Calder & Polbeth Harwood**

**By: Rev Dr Jonanda Groenewald**

**Text: Deuteronomy 31:1-8; John 13:33-36**

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On Thursday evening, as I drove home after the Bible Blether, I saw a beautiful full moon in the clear sky. I wanted to get a good look at it, but obviously couldn't manage that while I was driving, so I thought: "The minute I need to stop at a red traffic light, I'll get a proper look." So of course, all the lights were green!! (Why does *that* never happen when I'm late?!)

Luckily the very last one, in the main street of East Calder, turned red as I was approaching. So for the first time in my life I was happy to have to wait at a red light, and guess what happened to me *then*?

Where I stopped, the moon was right behind the traffic light! So I couldn't see it at all... Only once I started driving, the moon became visible to me again. I just had to laugh.

Now I know that in the greater scheme of this this was an EXTREMELY insignificant event; but you know – it made me think...

The moon was up there in the sky. I wanted to see it, I tried my best, but I couldn't. Only once I started moving forward, I could see it. The fact

that I couldn't see it for the traffic light blocking my view, didn't mean that it wasn't there. It was there all along, I just couldn't see it all the time.

And the same is true for the presence of God in our lives. He is ALWAYS there.

Even in the times when things happen to us that make it hard for us to see him. The fact that we can't see him or feel his presence doesn't mean that He's not there anymore. Sometimes we just need to adjust our position, look a little closer, move forward the slightest wee bit, and then we'll realise He's always been there. He will never desert us...



Both passages we read from Scripture today are about people being reassured that God will be with them all the time on their journeys through life.

The Old Testament passage is about the people of God moving into the Promised Land.

They were literally on the verge of a new chapter in their lives. They have travelled through the desert for 40 years - Which in those days was a very very long time, as not many people lived for more than 40 years.

(On a wee side note here: I just said that people probably only lived for about 40 years in those days, but our passage starts with Moses saying that he is now 120 years old. Nobody knows exactly how they counted and how long a year would have been for people in Old Testament

times, but what we do know is that numbers had important *symbolical* value for them. To become really old was seen as a blessing from God for a good life, so by saying that Moses was 120 years old, the author could just as well have said that Moses pleased the Lord, and therefore was blessed with a long life.

40, on the other hand, indicated just the right time, the full time planned by God for something. We read about many more 40's in the Bible – it rained for 40 days and 40 nights when Noah was in the Ark, the people of Nineveh were told by Jonah that they had 40 days to show repentance, Jesus spent 40 days and 40 nights in the desert fasting, to name but a few. *Pop into the Bible Blether on the 19<sup>th</sup> of May if you want to find out more about the significance of numbers in the Bible!*)

But to come back to the story: I can just imagine that although the 40 years in the desert was not an easy time in the lives of the people of God, they grew accustomed to living in the desert and travelling all the time. Some of them didn't know any other kind of life at all. And now this was coming to an end.

God promised them a land of their own. And here he is giving it to them, and although they must have been really happy about finally arriving at their promised destination, that must have been very scary for them as well... New, and strange. They were used to living in the desert. What was life going to be like now? Were they even going to like it?!

And to make it worse, their leader for this whole journey through the desert, Moses, who led them through thick and thin, who were always there to tell them what to do and to speak to God on their behalf, now all

of a sudden said that he was retiring. That he wasn't going to lead them into the Promised Land, that God appointed Joshua to do that.

A new land, and a new leader. I can just imagine how the uncertainty threw a huge big shadow over the excitement. And poor Joshua – filling Moses' shoes?! Was something like that even possible?

Fighting battles to gain land was just part and parcel of life in those days. Moving into this Promised Land implied going into battle with the current residents, and winning, first. - Which in itself was a terrifying prospect. But Moses consoles them by saying: "The Lord your God himself will cross over ahead of you."

And then, to proof this, he gives them a couple of examples of battles won for them by God on their way to the Promised Land.

The only condition was that they had to do everything that God commanded them to do.

After this, Moses encourages Joshua to lead the people into the land, and assures him as well that God will be with him all the time: "The Lord himself goes before you and will be with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged."

These were no empty words... Although they didn't know it yet at the time, we now know that God made the walls of Jericho crumble down and the Israelites had a very easy victory over their enemies.



All this might have happened a very very long time ago, but in a sense, I don't think anything has changed, at least in regards to our relationship with God. He still goes before us, no matter where we have to go in life, and he fights the battles that need to be fought on the way there *for* us.

And the proof we have for this, is Jesus. Through him God showed us that he will literally never leave us alone, through him God won the biggest battle of all for us, the battle against sin and death.

In John we read that Jesus told his disciples that he is going on ahead of them, that he will once again show them where to go and prepare the way for them, all they needed to do was to follow, in the right time. And in the meantime, all they had to do, was to love one another.

So here we see exactly the same promise as made by God through Moses – “I will never leave you nor forsake you, but please do what I command you.”

And this promise of God is still as true today as it was all those many years ago.

God will NEVER forsake us. He will show us the way, and he'll walk with us, every step of the way. And all we need to do, is to love one another. Not a bad deal...

All the stories we read in the Bible teaches us that God doesn't make empty promises. If you look back on your own life you might be able to see that God doesn't make empty promises.

But then, experience also tell us that sometimes we have such huge difficulties to face, that to us it *feels* as if we are completely alone. And then our problems become like a dark cloud surrounding us, making it almost impossible to see anything around us, least of all the presence of God in our lives.

Have you been there before? Are you maybe there *this* morning? In that deep, dark place, where you can't see God at all? Where nothing makes sense and you feel as if you are eaten up from inside by worries or fear or guilt?

It happens to all of us. It happened to the Israelites – why else did they need reassuring? It happened to the disciples, it even happened to Jesus himself. But not even once has God deserted any of them.

And he won't desert us either. He won't desert *you*.

So whether you are at the beginning of a new chapter in your life – because of choice, *or* because you had *no* choice – do not be afraid, the Lord your God will go with you.

Whether you are in the middle of mess – drowning in the mistakes you made or the circumstances life threw at you – do not be afraid, the Lord will never leave you nor forsake you.

Or whether you have been let down by somebody, somebody who promised to always be by your side; or whether that person who was always at your side passed away and left you feeling empty inside – do not be afraid, the Lord himself goes before you and will be with you...

There is a story of a family whose house caught fire. As each parent tried to grab a few belongings and a child's hand to get out of the house as quickly as possible, the wee girl who was holding the dad's hand, broke free from his grip and ran upstairs to get her teddy bear.

However, when she tried to come down again, she found that she was trapped by the flames. She ran to the upstairs window and shouted for her father's help. The father shouted back to her: "Jump down honey, I will catch you".

However, since she couldn't see her father clearly through the smoke, the little girl cried, "I'm scared to jump daddy, I can't see you." Her father replied: "Don't worry honey, you just jump. I'm right under you and I will catch you. Although you can't see me, I can see you."

Our heavenly Father sees us at all times. He will never desert us!

So although we don't know what will happen tomorrow, we *do* know that we won't have to face it alone. And because we believe in God, there is something else that we know as well: we can be absolutely sure of our ultimate destination.

So just remember: If it's hard to see God through the smoke of your difficult circumstances, do not be afraid, do not be discouraged – because he can see you. Always.

Amen