

About 16 years ago as I was preparing to go to seminary, I decided I should start reading some serious bible commentaries – you know – the kind of dense commentary that I would encounter in my bible classes when I got to divinity school, so I asked my rector at the time what he might suggest. I told him that I had begun reading the bible again from the beginning and was just starting Deuteronomy. He recommended the Interpretation Bible Commentary, so I dutifully purchased the volume on Deuteronomy and began reading the introduction.

No sooner had I started than I came across these sentences. “It is rare that one can say precisely who wrote a biblical book...” Huh? “That is certainly the case with the book of Deuteronomy.” Huh?! Slightly alarmed, I said to myself, “What do you mean we don’t know who wrote the book of Deuteronomy, let alone many of the other books of the bible? I have been taught for as long as I can remember that Moses wrote the first five books of the Bible: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers AND Deuteronomy! Of course, he wrote Deuteronomy!” I was incensed, though I couldn’t deny the arguments were pretty darn compelling... and this was yet more evidence that this whole seminary thing was going to be much more of a disruption than I might have originally thought. So much for affirmation and comfort. God’s call, I was learning, is as likely to disrupt and disturb as to affirm and comfort.

The book of Deuteronomy, it turns out, has a rather complex source history, pulling strands from the most formative events in the life of the people of Israel, from standing on the edge of the promised land after the escape from Egypt and years of wandering in the wilderness, to the affluence and security of living and prospering in the promised land, to the trauma of the complete and utter destruction and loss of that promised land with its insistent question, “where now is your God?”<sup>1</sup>

Deuteronomy is framed as something akin to Moses’ last will and testament – his farewell address to his people – a people about to be formed as a nation – standing on the border of the promised land, on the brink of receiving all that God has promised them. Moses has led them out of Egypt, fed them in the wilderness, given them the law, and saved them from their apostasy with the Golden Calf. Moses has done all this, but there is one thing he will not to do – cannot do – and that is take them across the Jordan before he dies. And so on that threshold Moses gave this farewell address – this long treatise to remind the Israelites of who they are, how they came to be, and what it means to live as God’s chosen people.

Nestled in this treatise, this long farewell address, is Moses' assurance to them that God will raise up another prophet, another leader. Moses assured them that they would not be alone. More importantly, Moses assured them that God is, in fact, with them, and that God would give them what they need to be the people God calls them to be. God is faithful to God's promises, so God's call doesn't just disrupt and disturb, by it God also comforts, assures, and provides.

Last week sometime Celal asked me if I knew what the readings were when we landed on this Sunday as my last Sunday here at St. Andrew's. I, in fact, did not know what the readings were – I hadn't checked at the time we landed on this Sunday as my last, so was a bit taken aback when I first read them to see how fitting they were for the occasion, specifically the reading from Deuteronomy. Now I want to I assure you, I am not about to launch into a lengthy treatise – a 34 chapter treatise. As the transition team knows, I've pretty much already done that in the form of a 15 page, single-spaced document with at least 34 accompanying files as reference that I handed over to them on Friday. Everything I could think of that there is to know that needs to be conveyed for the smooth transition of the ins and outs of mission, ministry, and management of St. Andrew's is nestled into those pages and pages of documents. So, no, no treatise this morning. I do, however, want to spend just a few more moments to remind you of who you are. To remind you that God is faithful to God's promises, and so God's call doesn't just disrupt and disturb, it also comforts, assures, and provides.

Similar to the book of Deuteronomy, St. Andrew's story is made up of a marvelously complex source history pulling from strands from the events and people and relationships that constitute its 143 year old life. Ten years ago almost exactly to the day, I stood right here and said to this community, "Together, we are celebrating a new invitation to follow Jesus as a new community – new because who we are today is not who we were 5 years ago, just as who we are now is not who we will be 5 years from now. And yet, this new call with these new relationships and new visions all come out of who St. Andrew's has been and who God has made St. Andrew's to be. This day has always been built into the DNA of St. Andrew's."

Ten years later, this day, too, has also always been built into the DNA of St. Andrew's. Back in 2009 before he was a parishioner here, Anthony gifted me one of his watercolors of St. Andrew's that has been hanging in the parish house on loan from me since that time. The painting is called "Abbott's Baileywick." St. Andrew's has been my special domain – my Baileywick – for these last 10 years, but we all know this isn't "my" church, and in case I were

ever to become confused about that, I need only recall being told upon my arrival that rectors come and rectors go. Though here at St. Andrew's you all tend to have to wait a pretty long time before rectors go after they come, average tenure being what it is here.

But the other truth of the matter is, it's not even your church. It's God's church. And as we know all too well, because of the reality of human existence and because of unique ministry of this place, people come and people go as sojourners here, whether for a long time or a short time. And through it all, St. Andrew's is really good at doing the work God has given us to do, to tend, to heal, to form for ministry and life and then send folks on their way with an abundance of love and blessings to do the work that they've been called to do in the places that they've been called to do it.

Nope, this church isn't any of ours. It is God's church, and those of us who pass through, some for our entire lives, some for a season, we hold this beloved community that God has called together in sacred trust. Today, I hand the trust that I've held over to you and into your care, and I remind you that God is faithful to God's promises, that God is with you, that God has already raised up for you a leader and is calling that person to you as surely as I stand here. I remind you that God will give you what you need to be the people—the community—that God continually calls you to be.

Mostly, I want to remind you that you are a community built on a charism of love. You are a community who is called to discover and share new dimensions of the length and width and height and breadth and depth of God's love in the world. I know because you all have shown me what it is to love and be loved in ways beyond my comprehension – in ways that stun and astound – and the immensity of the gratitude I feel is simply beyond expression. The world needs this charism of love. The world needs you. God needs you. God needs you to be God's people in this place at this time, giving witness to the promise of God that proclaims, "no matter who you are, you are loved and you belong!"

I pray above all else that you know how much I love you and how much I cherish the life and ministry we have shared in this love-soaked community. At the risk of being redundant, I pray these words saturate every fiber of your being: You are beloved. You are beloved of me. You are beloved of God.

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<sup>1</sup> Miller, Patrick D., *Deuteronomy: Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching*. Westminster John Knox Press.