



## Vineyard Boise Devotions | Numbers | Week 6

MONDAY

3/20/17

### tempo giusto

Read

<sup>1</sup> These are the stages of the people of Israel, when they went out of the land of Egypt by their companies under the leadership of Moses and Aaron. <sup>2</sup> Moses wrote down their starting places, stage by stage, by command of the Lord, and these are their stages according to their starting places. <sup>3</sup> They set out from Rameses in the first month, on the fifteenth day of the first month. On the day after the Passover, the people of Israel went out triumphantly in the sight of all the Egyptians, <sup>4</sup> while the Egyptians were burying all their firstborn, whom the Lord had struck down among them. On their gods also the Lord executed judgments.

<sup>5</sup> So the people of Israel set out from Rameses and camped at Succoth. <sup>6</sup> And they set out from Succoth and camped at Etham, which is on the edge of the wilderness. <sup>7</sup> And they set out from Etham and turned back to Pi-hahiroth, which is east of Baal-zephon, and they camped before Migdol. <sup>8</sup> And they set out from before Hahiroth and passed through the midst of the sea into the wilderness, and they went a three days' journey in the wilderness of Etham and camped at Marah. <sup>9</sup> And they set out from Marah and came to Elim; at Elim there were twelve springs of water and seventy palm trees, and they camped there. <sup>10</sup> And they set out from Elim and camped by the Red Sea. <sup>11</sup> And they set out from the Red Sea and camped in the wilderness of Sin. <sup>12</sup> And they set out from the wilderness of Sin and camped at Dophkah. <sup>13</sup> And they set out from Dophkah and camped at Alush. <sup>14</sup> And they set out from Alush and camped at Rephidim, where there was no water for the people to drink. <sup>15</sup> And they set out from Rephidim and camped in the wilderness of Sinai.

Numbers 33.1-15 | ESV

Reflect

Slow does not always mean slow. Performing a task in a slow manner often yields faster results. It is also possible to do things quickly while maintaining a Slow frame of mind. A century after Rudyard Kipling wrote of keeping your head while all about you are losing theirs, people are learning how to keep their cool, how to remain slow inside, even as they rush to meet a deadline at work or to get the children to school on time. Despite what some critics say, the Slow Movement is not about doing everything at a snail's pace. Nor is it a Luddite attempt to drag the whole planet back to some pre-industrial utopia. On the contrary, the movement is made up of people who want to live better in a fast-paced, modern world. That is why the Slow philosophy can be summed up in a single word: balance. Be fast when it makes sense to be fast, and be slow when slowness is called for. Seek to live at what musicians call the *tempo giusto* – the right speed.

Carl Honoré, *In Praise of Slowness*

The right speed.

The pace called for at this moment, at this intersection of time and space.

It's knowing when to stop, and when to start – and not being in a rush to do either!

Numbers 33 is a rather tedious chapter, filled with place names marking the starts and stops of a generation over four decades. Forty-two stages are found in this lackluster list, from Rameses to the Plains of the Jordan across from Jericho.

So, who cares, really?

Thus we quickly scan through the list spanning some forty-six verses that is almost as enthralling as Old Testament genealogies.

But we would be missing it – in both genealogies and such a travel-log. “All Scripture is God-breathed and helpful one way or another,” Paul tells Timothy and reminds us. Each genealogy is filled not with meaningless names but with faces and stories to be discovered and remembered. And not only is each stage of the Israelite journey a place rich with its own meaning, the very progression of starts and stops holds a crucial lesson for us in our high-speed world. It reveals the *tempo giusto* of a desert generation that unfortunately missed the point of that right speed as much as we too often do. It's not all go. Nor is it all stop. The secret is the successful alteration of the two!

In Israel's case, they had a visual cue as obvious as our traffic lights:

Throughout all their journeys, whenever the cloud was taken up from over the tabernacle, the people of Israel would set out. But if the cloud was not taken up, then they did not set out till the day that it was taken up. For the cloud of the Lord was on the tabernacle by day, and fire was in it by night, in the sight of all the house of Israel throughout all their journeys.

**Exodus 40.36-38 | ESV**

Yes, they had an explicit cue through an exterior signal.

We have a more implicit cue through an abiding Spirit.

Both require paying attention. But the implicit cue through an abiding Spirit requires just that, an *abiding*; the paying attention that flows from being in relationship. We don't rush from task to task any more than we drag our feet from here to there. We learn to release ourselves into the *tempo giusto* of the abiding Spirit of Christ in us, with us, upon us, around us that will have us booking it one moment. . .and stopping in the middle of the rush hour in the next to see, to be, or to do.

Which is, in a word, learning to live in the unforced rhythms of grace.

R e l a t e

How well have you mastered the art of finding your own *tempo giusto*? Do you tend to err on the side of going too fast or of not moving at all? What would you say is the key to finding the right speed in life?

R e s p o n d

Lord, I know what it is to rush  
and to be rushed;  
and I know too well  
what it is to be stalled,  
locked in my own inertia.

Liberate me to your *tempo giusto*!

Show me how to move more  
naturally  
organically  
in your unforced rhythms of grace.

## Don't make us cross this Jordan!

### Read

<sup>1</sup> Now the people of Reuben and the people of Gad had a very great number of livestock. And they saw the land of Jazer and the land of Gilead, and behold, the place was a place for livestock. <sup>2</sup> So the people of Gad and the people of Reuben came and said to Moses and to Eleazar the priest and to the chiefs of the congregation, <sup>3</sup> "Ataroth, Dibon, Jazer, Nimrah, Heshbon, Elealeh, Sebam, Nebo, and Beon, <sup>4</sup> the land that the Lord struck down before the congregation of Israel, is a land for livestock, and your servants have livestock." <sup>5</sup> And they said, "If we have found favor in your sight, let this land be given to your servants for a possession. Do not take us across the Jordan."

<sup>16</sup> "We will build sheepfolds here for our livestock, and cities for our little ones, <sup>17</sup> but we will take up arms, ready to go before the people of Israel, until we have brought them to their place. And our little ones shall live in the fortified cities because of the inhabitants of the land. <sup>18</sup> We will not return to our homes until each of the people of Israel has gained his inheritance. <sup>19</sup> For we will not inherit with them on the other side of the Jordan and beyond, because our inheritance has come to us on this side of the Jordan to the east." <sup>20</sup> So Moses said to them, "If you will do this, if you will take up arms to go before the Lord for the war, <sup>21</sup> and every armed man of you will pass over the Jordan before the Lord, until he has driven out his enemies from before him <sup>22</sup> and the land is subdued before the Lord; then after that you shall return and be free of obligation to the Lord and to Israel, and this land shall be your possession before the Lord. <sup>23</sup> But if you will not do so, behold, you have sinned against the Lord, and be sure your sin will find you out. <sup>24</sup> Build cities for your little ones and folds for your sheep, and do what you have promised."

Numbers 32.1-5, 16-24 | ESV

### Reflect

Now concerning our brother Apollos, I strongly urged him to visit you with the other brothers, but it was not at all his will to come now. He will come when he has opportunity.

1 Corinthians 16.12-13 | ESV

Try to imagine this.

The Apostle Paul (did I mention that he's the *Apostle* Paul?) strongly urging me to make a quick trip to Corinth to help further smooth out the conflicted and confused situation there.

And I say "No."

And not just "No," but "NO."

Paul "besought him much" - he pleaded with him at great length with a bulleted list of impassioned reasons and Apollos met him with a "that's NOT AT ALL what I WANT to do right now; it's not going to happen." And Paul relents and releases. "He'll be along when he has a good opportunity to do so."

Yes, I'm still trying to imagine this.

It says so much about Paul - and Apollos too.

At times we can be so sure on what God's travel plans are for each other! The sometimes hard reality to grasp is that we often don't have much choice on our own itinerary - let alone that for one another.

Equally hard for me to imagine is when Moses - who has just been denied access to the Holy

Land and is forbidden to cross the Jordan – is confronted with the leaders of two tribes who plead with him **not** to make them cross over.

The nerve.

Moses' itinerary has from the earliest days included passage into the "land flowing with milk and honey" and he has eagerly been anticipating that final stamp in his rather full passport (forty-two destinations in 40 years!). But, after repeated pleadings of his own, it's not in his itinerary after all. "Do not ask me about this again," God tells him.

And now here come these leaders from the tribes of Reuben and Gad pleading not to be made to go where Moses with all his heart wants to. As the Beatles sang, "She has a ticket to ride, but she don't care."

The unmitigated gall.

It's not hard to detect the consternation in Moses, no doubt fueled by his angst over his own unstamped passport, as well as the effect their settling on this side of the Jordan would potentially have on the rest of the tribes. Will they all decide this side is good enough? Will everyone want to stay here but me? A compromise is reached – the men will lead the way in crossing over and fighting for the land flowing with milk and honey that they really aren't interested in, and when the dust had settled, along with their fellow Israelites, they will cross back over and settle right where they now stood.

Yes, it does take some *chutzpah* to do this, to insist against the grain of a strong leader like Moses that you don't want to go where he insists you must; to stay while the majority are heading out.

But this too is a crucial quality to be embraced by those who in any generation would go...even when going where he bids you means staying where you are.

R e l a t e

Just how much nerve, how much *chutzpah* do you have to either go or stay when everyone around you is doing the opposite – and a strong leader tells you *this* is what you need to do? Where does this kind of audacity come from? How do we cultivate it?

R e s p o n d

Lord, sometimes, I admit it,  
I enjoy being the odd man out,  
often for all the wrong ego-driven reasons;  
and often I am quite happy  
to quietly go along  
with whatever, wherever  
the people around me would go,  
often for all the wrong driven-to-please reasons.

Let it be your "yes" or "no" that drives me  
to stay or  
to go  
for all of the right  
"Thy will be done" reasons.

## Then drew near the daughters. . .

### Read

<sup>1</sup> Then drew near the daughters of Zelophehad the son of Hopher, son of Gilead, son of Machir, son of Manasseh, from the clans of Manasseh the son of Joseph. The names of his daughters were: Mahlah, Noah, Hoglah, Milcah, and Tirzah. <sup>2</sup> And they stood before Moses and before Eleazar the priest and before the chiefs and all the congregation, at the entrance of the tent of meeting, saying, <sup>3</sup> “Our father died in the wilderness. He was not among the company of those who gathered themselves together against the Lord in the company of Korah, but died for his own sin. And he had no sons. <sup>4</sup> Why should the name of our father be taken away from his clan because he had no son? Give to us a possession among our father's brothers.”

<sup>5</sup> Moses brought their case before the Lord. <sup>6</sup> And the Lord said to Moses, <sup>7</sup> “The daughters of Zelophehad are right. You shall give them possession of an inheritance among their father's brothers and transfer the inheritance of their father to them. <sup>8</sup> And you shall speak to the people of Israel, saying, ‘If a man dies and has no son, then you shall transfer his inheritance to his daughter. <sup>9</sup> And if he has no daughter, then you shall give his inheritance to his brothers. <sup>10</sup> And if he has no brothers, then you shall give his inheritance to his father's brothers. <sup>11</sup> And if his father has no brothers, then you shall give his inheritance to the nearest kinsman of his clan, and he shall possess it. And it shall be for the people of Israel a statute and rule, as the Lord commanded Moses.”

Numbers 27.1-11 | ESV

### Reflect

In a climate of ongoing skepticism – the climate of the Book of the Wilderness – which faith, trust, and love are constantly challenged, these women speak, breathe a different language. In a moment of emergency, they emerge from the swarm of life. Without assurance that they will be heard, they allow themselves to be known. . . . inspired by the energy of loving conviction, they speak against the status quo of legal understanding. They speak with a fierce serenity. They represent an emergency ethic. Their passion becomes a paradigm for all human courage in the face of conformity. **Avivah Zornberg**

In the forty years of a dismal desert tale of many speaking and misspeakings, we finally hear God saying, “Yes! At last! A good word!” As Zornberg observes, “This unprecedented divine compliment resonates powerfully toward the end of a book in which so many unhappy acts of speech have been recorded...after forty years of misspeaking, five sisters achieve an act of *dibbur* (speech) that gains a gratified response from God, made all the more intense for the misfires of the past.”

This is the tale of the five sisters.  
Talk about *chutzpah!*

Trace their steps and then watch their words.

Two verbs stand out – all the more remarkable for their unusual plural feminine gender form: Before they even open their mouths they **come forward** and then they **stand** before all the dignified (male) leaders among the people. “Come forward” and “stand before” both indicating a bold act in a time when the wrong person at the wrong place and time could unleash consuming fire from heaven. Long before there was Esther risking it all to enter the presence of the king unbidden, there were the five daughters of Zelophehad approaching the presence of their King equally unbidden. They were Esther's trailblazers.

"Before a word has been spoken, the narrative has set these sisters in a world that holds no obvious place for them." Five women whose only credentials were the names of male relatives as they now stand before male authorities in a male dominated landscape.

And the word they then spoke?

*T'na lanu.* "Give us." It's a phrase we've encountered frequently in these desert tracks - as well as beyond them. "Give us water." "Give us meat." "Give us seed." "Give me a burial site." Give me your vineyard." The tone is forceful, expressing a vital need they feel passionate about - and the strong implication that they will not be taking "no" for an answer.

"Why should our father's name be lost?" they add, issuing a challenge to justify the unjustifiable, and also making clear to them and to us that these are no ancient feminists as we know them - they were the daughters of a man and in the name of their father they seek their place within his family, tribe, and order. And they find and use their voice rather forcefully to do it.

And God says, "Yes! A good word, at last!"

Perhaps God's verbal high five to the five daughters is due to the fact that despite four decades of an undertow in which an entire generation stubbornly dug its heels into the sand not wanting to go, these five bold women finally express passion from the rank and file of the people to actually take possession of what awaits them on the other side of the Jordan.

And what a poignant contrast this must have been for Moses as he is about to deal the two tribes who petition him to stay right here on this side as he processes his own thwarted desire to cross over himself.

These five women weren't just Esther's trailblazers. They're our pioneers too.

Empowering us to draw near.

To take our stand.

To use our voice.

And to seek what is ours as we go.

## R e l a t e

When recently have you found yourself in the need of courage to step forward against the grain of a generation and use your voice? What happened?

## R e s p o n d

Chutzpah. Audacity. Boldness.

I need more than just a dab of these.

O these tendencies to be  
reticent when I need to be responsive,  
laid back when I need to stand out,  
quiet when I need to make some noise.

Make me a child of Zelophehad today

One who knows

how to approach the bench

how to stand on my own feet

and

how to find and use my voice

in a just cause.

And when.

# THURSDAY

## boundaries

3/23/17

<sup>1</sup> The Lord spoke to Moses, saying, <sup>2</sup> “Command the people of Israel, and say to them, When you enter the land of Canaan (this is the land that shall fall to you for an inheritance, the land of Canaan as defined by its borders), <sup>3</sup> your south side shall be from the wilderness of Zin alongside Edom, and your southern border shall run from the end of the Salt Sea on the east.

<sup>4</sup> And your border shall turn south of the ascent of Akrabbim, and cross to Zin, and its limit shall be south of Kadesh-barnea. Then it shall go on to Hazar-addar, and pass along to Azmon.

<sup>5</sup> And the border shall turn from Azmon to the Brook of Egypt, and its limit shall be at the sea.

<sup>6</sup> “For the western border, you shall have the Great Sea and its[a] coast. This shall be your western border.

<sup>7</sup> “This shall be your northern border: from the Great Sea you shall draw a line to Mount Hor.

<sup>8</sup> From Mount Hor you shall draw a line to Lebo-hamath, and the limit of the border shall be at Zedad. <sup>9</sup> Then the border shall extend to Ziphron, and its limit shall be at Hazar-enan. This shall be your northern border.

<sup>10</sup> “You shall draw a line for your eastern border from Hazar-enan to Shepham. <sup>11</sup> And the border shall go down from Shepham to Riblah on the east side of Ain. And the border shall go down and reach to the shoulder of the Sea of Chinnereth on the east. <sup>12</sup> And the border shall go down to the Jordan, and its limit shall be at the Salt Sea. This shall be your land as defined by its borders all around.”

Numbers 34.1-12 | ESV

### R e f l e c t

The Lord is my chosen portion and my cup;  
you hold my lot.

The lines have fallen for me in pleasant places;  
indeed, I have a beautiful inheritance.

~ King David (Psalm 16.5-6)

There's a wondrous randomness in David's expression here: “the lines have *fallen*,” says he. This leans back into the reality that the boundary of each tribe's inheritance was determined by lot. Each line was a roll of the dice. Literally. And “the lots' every decision is from the Lord.”

Need to settle a dispute or make a choice in that culture? Well, do you have some dice?

This is probably how the Urim and the Thumim (“lights and perfections”) were used – those mysterious stones (evidently) kept within the high priestly breastplate. Does God want us to go or to stay, to advance or to wait? Cast the die.

No, it wasn't exactly scientific, but in a world where “time and chance happen to them all” they viewed the Creator of that world as the author of all seemingly random processes.

Such a view of life requires – and enables – a profound sense of “releasement.” The German word it is *Gelassenheit*, defined by the German philosopher Heidegger as “a spirit of availability before What-Is which permits us to let things be in their uncertainty and mystery.” It's a yieldedness, a let-go-ness that isn't mere resignation or fatalism, but rather an optimistic view of life that discerns even in the good, bad, and random ugliness of life the movements of the One “who makes everything beautiful in its time.”

From such a vantage point, boundaries are not restrictions to be resented or pressed, but invitations to explore what has been given to us.

Paul embodies this Gelassenheit vantage point beautifully:

We aren't making outrageous claims here. We're sticking to the limits of what God has set for us. But there can be no question that those limits reach to and include you. We're not moving into someone else's "territory." We were already there with you, weren't we? We were the first ones to get there with the Message of Christ, right? So how can there be any question of overstepping our bounds by writing or visiting you?

We're not barging in on the rightful work of others, interfering with their ministries, demanding a place in the sun with them. What we're hoping for is that as your lives grow in faith, you'll play a part within our expanding work. And we'll all still be within the limits God sets as we proclaim the Message in countries beyond Corinth. But we have no intention of moving in on what others have done and taking credit for it. "If you want to claim credit, claim it for God." What you say about yourself means nothing in God's work. It's what God says about you that makes the difference.

**2 Corinthians 10.13-18 | MSG**

These are the marching orders for us, hidden beneath the layers of yet another seemingly tedious text. Boundaries that run to here and to here and to here and to here, blah blah blah. But each of these delineated spaces contained its own Wonderland awaiting discovery.

This is not tedium, but treasure.

Something we would do well to remember when we consider how the lines have fallen to us.

## R e l a t e

How have you experienced "the lines falling to you in pleasant places" in your own life? As you consider your life, do you experience releasement or resentment? Or a mixture of each? Why?

## R e s p o n d

Lord, you do make everything beautiful in its time.  
But how  
impatient  
distracted  
clouded  
myopic  
I can be before I see it.

Increase the bandwidth of my gratitude!  
Work a deeper releasement  
within me  
into these pleasant places  
from you,  
with you,  
right here,  
right now.



## refuge

### Read

<sup>6</sup> “The cities that you give to the Levites shall be the six cities of refuge, where you shall permit the manslayer to flee, and in addition to them you shall give forty-two cities. <sup>7</sup> All the cities that you give to the Levites shall be forty-eight, with their pasturelands. <sup>8</sup> And as for the cities that you shall give from the possession of the people of Israel, from the larger tribes you shall take many, and from the smaller tribes you shall take few; each, in proportion to the inheritance that it inherits, shall give of its cities to the Levites.”

<sup>9</sup> And the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, <sup>10</sup> “Speak to the people of Israel and say to them, When you cross the Jordan into the land of Canaan, <sup>11</sup> then you shall select cities to be cities of refuge for you, that the manslayer who kills any person without intent may flee there. <sup>12</sup> The cities shall be for you a refuge from the avenger, that the manslayer may not die until he stands before the congregation for judgment. <sup>13</sup> And the cities that you give shall be your six cities of refuge. <sup>14</sup> You shall give three cities beyond the Jordan, and three cities in the land of Canaan, to be cities of refuge. <sup>15</sup> These six cities shall be for refuge for the people of Israel, and for the stranger and for the sojourner among them, that anyone who kills any person without intent may flee there.

Numbers 35.6-15 | ESV

### Reflect

What an instructive note on which this *Bamidbar* book of desert wanderings and wranglings, misfires and maledictions now ends.

Confirming the process by which the five daughters inherit the land that would have been their fathers – and the designation of six “cities of refuge” for “manslayers.”

That’s right, this book wraps up with a provision for refugees within and without.

It’s an interesting Hebrew word, this word translated “refuge.” It means to be stunted, deformed, “lacking in parts.” The Levites – whose work in the tabernacle involved little that could be deformed, stunted, or lacking in parts – had no territory of their own alongside the other tribes of Israel; they were only given towns within other tribal lands. And six of those towns, three to the east of the Jordan and three to the west, north, center, and south on each side, were to be designated a “safe place” for those with blood on their hands (manslaughter rather than premeditated murder).

The dealers in the Perfect were to be handlers of the imperfect.

In a time and space where what we might term “frontier justice” often prevailed when someone in the family was killed – whether it was an accident or not – mercy could be in short supply.

But God provides.

As we frequently observe in our world, so often God is loathe to bring our darker ways to a screeching halt, but instead administers grace and mercies into the midst of our swirling mess. Here he does so in the form of six strategically located and accessible towns:

Golan.  
Ramoth.  
Bosor,  
Kadesh.  
Shechem.  
Hebron.

These are more than ancient geographical points of interest on the Numbers landscape. They serve as a commissioning call in every age for us individually and corporately to function as places of refuge where justice and mercy meet – where the fictitious Monseigneur Bienvenu who became a refuge for the convict Jean Valjean in Hugo's *Les Miserables* becomes incarnate in us, on our street, in our town, in our time.

Ultimately, as Christ followers, we are portable, moveable “cities of refuge” in our world – the safe place where the prodigal can always see the Father running towards him.  
To embrace.  
To clothe.  
And to welcome, finally, everyone home.

#### R e l a t e

How is God calling you to function practically as a portable, moveable “city of refuge” in our world? What might this look like for you?

#### R e s p o n d

Thank you for these desert songs, Lord.  
Thank you for the green pastures  
along seemingly barren pathways.

Through these,  
Teach me to Number my days aright  
And gain a heart of wisdom  
in the wide world.

Through Christ.

# green pastures

