

Sunday November 20, 2022

## Lesson 12: Lessons from Other Faith Traditions

Scripture: Exodus 18:1, 13-27

### **Context:**

This fall we continue our series titled “Freedom.” We continue with our unit of the series, “Faithful Conversations.” The focus of the unit will be on how we have neighborly conversations with those different than us who might be outside our comfort zones. Today’s scripture lesson comes from the Old Testament with the book of Exodus and focuses on the leadership of Moses. The purpose of today’s lesson will be to consider wisdom from those of other backgrounds.

Following the departure from Egypt, the Israelites found themselves wandering around in the wilderness. As they wandered around, one of the places they stopped to set up camp was near Midian, a place where Moses had lived and met his wife Zipporah. The Midianites welcomed the Israelites and unlike other tribes who met the Israelites, there was a peaceful exchange. The priest of the Midianites was Jethro, who was Moses’ father-in-law. Despite the fact he led in worshipping other gods and goddesses, Jethro is intrigued as he hears of everything God has done for Moses and for God’s people Israel.

Jethro comes to see his son-in-law and watches how he functions at work. As the Israelites have left the Egyptians, they are faced with a new freedom. They must discover how to form societal structures of their own.<sup>1</sup> As a result, there will be trial and error in discovering what works for them and who possesses what gifts. The redeemed community should be anxious to discover what gifts they possess and make use of them with gratitude, in both secular and religious spheres.<sup>2</sup> At times this means discoveries of what gifts are present and who is able to share them.

Moses, as well as the people, believe as he leads them, he should do all things from judge cases of disputes to teaching God’s regulations and laws. As a result, Moses is with the people from dawn until dusk as people surround him coming with their disputes and questions. Moses’ experience of redemption does not immediately endow him or others in Israel with efficient and creative administrative skills.<sup>3</sup> He has been a prince, a shepherd, a reluctant speaker for God, and now he must discover what leadership needs in moving the people to the next place.

Jethro observes how Moses functions and then confronts him about how this will burn Moses out. Jethro, even as an outside priest, can see how Moses is not functioning as God has made him to function. He tells him about the power of delegating and appointing sound community justices. Wise discernment of what seems prudent in this situation is believed to be just as much the will of God as a specific divine verbal communication.<sup>4</sup> God works through a foreign priest to help Moses and the people of God be who they are called to be.

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<sup>1</sup> Fretheim, Terence E. “Exodus.” *Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 2010), 198.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 199.

## **Application**

Last week, the application piece addressed how we encounter people of different faith traditions. This week, we think about the wisdom and counsel to come from other traditions and how they might give practical lessons for today. We learn how the gift of wisdom is given by God to others, even those who do not profess the same faith we do. And who are we to question why God does such a thing?

At this point in our education systems, whether private or public, students are required to learn about different religious traditions. Sometimes the way it is taught is by examining various practices or holidays of those traditions and seeing what they point to as values in the tradition. Other times it is by objects which hold meaning and tell part of their formation in a religious community.

What I came to learn is while I find my path and truth come in following Christ our Lord, I can also appreciate the various focal points of other religious traditions and find similarities in my own or see something to enhance my faith. I also come to discover in learning about other religious traditions of what I appreciate the most in my faith. I do not see my faith as superior as much as I see clearer what I believe and value.

Yet there is wisdom in what some of the other traditions can offer for us. For example, I remember reading in middle school about how all Muslims make it a goal to travel at least once in their lifetime to Mecca. Some can do it yearly; for others it is a once in a lifetime experience. Yet as I reflected on this pilgrimage, I wondered why Christians do not focus as much on holy sites. As I grew up, I sought opportunities to have my own pilgrimages: to see Jerusalem and the Holy Land, to visit England and the footsteps of John Wesley. While I know every person may not have means to have such opportunities, I wondered how Christians might see pilgrimages to grow closer to our Lord and discover more about our faith.

Or for a more daily practice, I think about how the Jewish tradition sees prayer. Whatever branch of Judaism one finds themselves in, there is a focus on the Shema, found in Deuteronomy, as well as prayers recited repeatedly. In the Christian tradition, we can be quick to dismiss written prayers of those before us or even liturgical practices like confessing the Apostles Creed. Yet as I have talked with practicing Jews and seen their services, I am reminded of how words matter and the gifts of tapping into our ancient faith practices forms us in ways which are so important. And thus, I try to find ways to pray the prayers of those before me in addition to my own.

At other times, I find the various religious traditions give me more of an inspiration for exploring my own faith journey and how I see and experience daily life. For instance, I am often struck by the rich colors and joy to come in celebrations within the Hindu tradition. How do we seek to have joyous celebrations in the church and enjoy bright colors and times of joy? In both sacred and secular events, I have sought to find those ways to celebrate with color, feasting, and an appreciation for life.

Hopefully at some point in your life, you have experienced or heard of something from another religious tradition. While there are of course things you may not like or agree with in various traditions, hopefully there are things which you see the spirit behind them and the wisdom or formation to give to others. Just as we read of today, sometimes those who practice a different faith may have things to offer to us so we might become better disciples of our Lord as we seek to live and honor God as we labor together. We learn from those of other backgrounds and grow in our own faith walk. We learn to see better the gifts of other as well as the ones God

has given us.

Have you experienced wisdom from a different faith tradition? Why do you think God gives different people gifts, even those outside Christianity? What are practices you've seen in other traditions you wish you could see more of in Christianity? How can we learn to appreciate the wisdom and counsel of others? What tradition will you research this week and learn more about?

Rev. Dr. E. Hunter Pugh  
Pastor of Brantley – Brunson Chapel Charge  
PO Box 71  
Brantley, AL 36009