

Trust and Transformation in Times of Change: Let Resistance Be Your Guide
Numbers 11:4-6, 10-16, 24-29
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This summer, when our family was on vacation, Sara was completely absorbed in this book titled, *Maybe You Should Talk to Someone*. By Lori Gottlieb. She would be laughing and crying and completely blocking me out. I asked, "so what's the book about?" She said, "it's a memoir written by a therapist, who then goes to see a therapist, and she's talking about her life as a therapist and her own therapy, and she's really funny and she's smart. I think you would get a lot of the book." "Ok, I'll put it on my list," I said.

I got back from vacation, and I was checking in with Pastor Lauren, and said, Sara recommended this book written by a therapist... Lauren interrupted, "is it, *Maybe You Should Talk to Someone?*" I said, "yes." She said "Jonathan is reading that and told me I should read it too." Lauren and I thought we should listen to our spouses and read the book.

A central character in the book is a client of the therapist, the writer, and his name is John. John is an obnoxious narcissist. As the book unfolds, you're going deeper into his story and his struggles in the same way that you are going deeper in the story and struggles of the writer.

In her first session with John, she learns that he sees everyone else as an "idiot." He's sending out all kinds of defenses to keep anyone from getting too close to him and his pain.

She says, "As a therapist, I know a lot about pain, about the ways in which pain is tied to loss. But I also know something less commonly understood: that change and loss travel together. We can't have change without loss. Which is why so often people say they want change but nonetheless stay exactly the same. To help John, I'm going to have to figure out what his loss would be, but first, I'm going to have to understand mine."

In this book the therapist and her clients start discovering transformation as they are understanding and facing their own losses.

This summer, I've been thinking a lot about change and loss, and Pastor Lauren and I have been talking a lot about change and loss. There have been changes at the church. Pastor Abby departed. I'm returning after being gone for the legislative session. Pastor Lauren is on our staff, and she is doing all kinds of good work. We are looking to hire an interim minister. So much has been changing, and there is loss traveling with that change.

In my neighborhood, the neighbors on both sides of us are moving, and our neighborhood feels different. I talked with my sister on the phone last week as her oldest child, my nephew Ben started college at the University of Iowa. I listened as she told me what it was like to drop him off, and we both reminisced about leaving home and talked through what it was like for us and what it must have been like for our parents. I see relationships that are changing and jobs that are changing. On a macro level, so much of what is toxic in our

politics has to do with change and trying to prevent the losses that come with it, rather than thinking about the healthiest ways to work through it together.

With this in mind, Pastor Lauren and I decided to spend a few weeks with the theme: Trust and Transformation in Times of Change. As people of faith, we rehearse that God's love is there for us in times of change and loss. Paul says, "There's nothing that can separate us from the love of God." The last words of Jesus in the gospel of Matthew are, "I am with you always, to the end of the age," to the ultimate of changes.

When we face the reality of death, and live after losing someone we dearly love; when we are in struggle or turmoil because we are losing something dear to us, we affirm that God is with us. We are invited to trust that God's love is present and strong, working in ways that we cannot see. Our ancestors of faith affirm again and again, "as you trust in this love of God, you will discover resurrection after crucifixion, you will find your way home after wandering in the wilderness." "You will discover God providing what you need along the way." This is where our story for today comes in.

In our passage from Numbers for today, the Israelites have just started wandering in the wilderness, and they are complaining. Life is getting hard now. Moses is hearing weeping in the tents, and there's a rabble on the edges, making noise, craving meat.

Is this complaining only about food, or are the people resisting something deeper at the same time?

Though I've preached on this story before, this time I'm reading the complaints as an expression of loss. The complaint of the Israelites is pretty bold. How ironic for the Israelites to want to go back to slavery. The people complain because they are in slavery. God delivers them. Then in the wilderness they say, "Remember the food we had for free in Egypt. Fish for nothing. Cucumbers, melons, leeks and garlic. Those were good meals. Why did we ever leave Egypt?" God can't win.

There's idealized distortion in what the Israelites are remembering, but besides the food, the Israelites are also expressing the loss of what was familiar. As they are rehearsing the way things were and not remembering the lashes and the forced labor and the bondage, they are resisting going deeper into what is uncertain and unknowable, what is necessary for new life.

At one point in the book *Maybe You Should Talk to Someone*, the author is reflecting on one of her patients and how much resistance is being put forward, and she shares that in therapy, resistance isn't the enemy it's your friend. It can be the guide to what is painful, to what we have lost or feel like we are losing.

It's a good insight for us as we think about the resistance we put forward, if we can be brave enough to look at our own resistance to change and to ask what might be behind it or the loss and pain that is underneath it. Sometimes we are fighting things automatically, and we don't even know why.

In the story from Numbers, all the characters are resisting one another. The people are resistant. Moses is resistant. God is resistant. Behind the complaint for food is a loss of familiarity and security. Moses feels misunderstood, by God and the people. God can't win, and God just wants to be trusted. God has done so much good for the people, and now it is like it never happened at all.

For the people of Israel to get to a place of true security, and not to return to a place of false security like Egypt, but to get to a place of true life, they will need to trust. They will need to let go. They will need to place their trust in God not just once, but to make this trusting, and a renewal of their trusting, a way of life.

The path before the people of Israel is also the path before us as people of faith. There's great promise, and there is the loss of a way of being. Remember what the therapist said, "We can't have change without loss. Which is why so often people say they want change but nonetheless stay exactly the same." The life of faith will change us, and we will lose some of the way we have been. We will lose some of what is familiar. The life of faith, this life of placing more and more trust in the love of God, is hard work.

It is difficult to trust that God will come through and actually get us through the vulnerable wilderness.

The Numbers story, though, provides another example of God coming through with what is needed. God doesn't just prove trustworthy, but provides this security on the journey in a ridiculous sort of way. The people want meat. So, in the section after what was read today, God brings quail from the sea, in absurd quantities. The quail are two cubits deep (or 3 feet deep on the ground, like 3 feet of snow). The people gather the quail, and the least anyone gathers is 10 homers. A homer is 6 and $\frac{1}{4}$ bushels. People are gathering 60 bushels of quail.

God suddenly provides not just a little, but an abundance. More than could have been imagined. This is a common refrain in the Bible. As we place our trust in God, we discover God coming through with an abundance of goodness.

Life is changing all the time, and with change comes loss, with loss comes pain. And yet, the promise of our faith is that God is with us. God will provide what we need, and we have witnesses who tell us over and over again that God gives more than we thought was possible. With trust in this love, we may find the courage to face the losses underneath any resistance we might be putting forward, and discover God's transformation too. Amen.