

Immerse Day 30 :: Mar. 12

Here comes the hard part.

So far, we've been reading stories. Genesis is a whole slew of good Bible stories, and the beginning of Exodus is the same. But now the scale slides further and further toward laws, rules, and codes, which makes the reading much more difficult. Who wouldn't rather read a good mystery than a tax code? So let me start today with some encouragement. Keep at it! Keep reading, and when you read, fight the urge to skip over sections that seem irrelevant. Everything is important, even if it might not seem so at first blush.

** This has been a public service announcement. We now return you to our regularly scheduled blog**

Nobody likes boundaries. Boundaries are considered restrictive impositions on our freedom. They lock us in, or keep us out, or push us away. We know this deeply in COVID land. Shelter-in-place orders, six-foot social distancing... we are tired of boundaries. So we do what every human being has done – we push against them.

Yesterday God's people arrived at Mt. Sinai, and the first thing God did for us was to set boundaries. He begins with literal boundaries to keep people away from the mountain. But then we move on to other boundaries; legal, religious, communal boundaries. We call them Commandments or Rules or Laws, but they are a different sort of boundary set around a community who has to live together without killing each other.

And like every child everywhere the first question we ask about these boundaries is, "Why?" "I don't need boundaries! You just don't trust me. You just want to control me. You don't believe in freedom!" But if we can read these scriptures in context, we have to remember that this is a brand new community. They have been slaves of the Egyptians for over 400 years (that's nearly 15 generations!) and now they are suddenly their own people. So, um, now what? How do we live if we're not to live by Egyptian law? What boundaries are there on our behaviors?

And so, like a toddler being told never to cross the street alone, God sets boundaries for His people. Why? Because He loves them. Left to their own behavior, there will soon be death, subjugation of the weak, and a quick return to slavery. So out of His love for them, God sets boundaries to ensure justice for the underdogs (widows, orphans, foreigners) and fair play for everyone.

And even here we begin to see how God will work within the framework (another boundary) of His own laws. "I am a merciful God," God says, and He means it. There is grace in these laws. We just have to remember that grace is forgiving when we break a law and not forgetting that there are laws in the first place. For a community without boundaries is a community bound to return to slavery once again.