

Jeanne Marcus: Doubt and Dedication (2)

Seekers Church

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Emily asked during the comment time [last week](#) whether I intended to preach my sermon again the next Sunday. As it happened, no one was signed up to preach today, and Emily's comment must have planted some seeds. I was asked whether I'd be willing to follow up on last week's sermon by reminding us of some of its themes, adding a couple of new reflections, and then opening up a space for others of us to speak about what has been coming up in their own prayer and discernment.

Last week, I tried to show how the pairing of "doubt and dedication" suggests that doubt is an important part of our knowing how to commit ourselves in the world. In any important place of commitment, the struggle with the doubts that arise can lead us to recalling the promises of richness and blessing that led us to making the commitment in the first place. Exploring with our doubts as guide can lead us to more clarity about what the important issues are in our lives; and that clarity in turn helps us commit to the way we will give ourselves to the world. We can re-choose dedication; or, if we need to, make new life-giving changes.

A vibrant community should make plenty of room for doubt to emerge in its life together, because doubt can be a holy gift. It can lead us, if we can work with it wisely, to a renewed sense of connection, promise and vision.

To explore the truth of this premise, last week I looked at some of my own doubts about how we are dealing with the effects of owning and renovating our building on Carroll Street. We, who have been a "tent people" for so long, have chosen to become "a Temple people." It is going to make all the difference. Nevertheless, I doubt whether we Seekers have yet caught up with the implications that owning a building will have for us as a community.

Confronted with doubt and all the delays and messiness even to this point, do we begin to wonder whether our decision to move was right for us? Is it worth it? It is at this point, I argued, that doubt can move us to a renewed sense of dedication. It leads us to remember what it was that led us Seekers to decide to move in the first place.

For me, it is about our being given a vision of making ourselves available to the world in new ways. When we decided to buy this building, and to give over one million dollars towards the renovation, wasn't it because we had a glimpse of the richness and fullness and newness of a new way of being Seekers? Ultimately, wasn't our decision about a vision of Seekers Church going out to be connected to a larger community around us? Didn't it have something to do with our making the building a resource for others, not only for ourselves? Therefore, when I struggle with my doubts, I turn to recall the vision, remembering the time when God's promise for this building was clearer to me. Then I feel sustained through the frustrations, and renew a commitment to the tasks of creating new containers to hold our life together, now in a building we must care for.

Last week, I talked about the story of Moses sending out 12 men to spy out Canaan. All come back agreeing that the land they have seen is a land flowing with milk and honey and bearing good fruit. However, 10 of the 12 go on to report that the people who dwell in the land are very large and strong, and that the cities they saw were heavily fortified. "All the

people we saw are men of gigantic size," they report. "We felt no bigger than grasshoppers; and that is how we looked to them."

Only two of the men, Caleb and Joshua, believed that the Israelites were strong enough to conquer the land, with Yahweh's help. However, the people as a whole came down on the side of the 10 who felt like grasshoppers, voicing impassioned objections to trying to enter Canaan. God then decreed that none who had come up out of Egypt seeing God's great signs and wonders but had still held back at the border of Canaan would come into the Promised Land.

The Israelites had been given a brief glimpse of the future that God intended for them, full of newness, abundance and blessing. Nevertheless, the land was filled with Canaanites, with obstacles that made them feel like grasshoppers. They were not ready yet: and so they felt completely terrorized by the impossibility of what they had seen. They return to their wilderness lives to build up their souls, and their institutions and the patterns of living. It took them many years to build a life strong enough to support the newness, the richness, the beauty and the mystery of the life that they had glimpsed in a moment of vision long before, and were now ready to claim for themselves.

Now to carry the story a bit further. When the forty years of waiting were over, and the Israelites were ready for their new life in Canaan, they gathered up all they had and all they were in order to confront their future. They approached the Jordan River: but just as they were poised to cross over, they paused – to listen. At this important moment, Moses spoke what is virtually the entire Book of Deuteronomy: he retold the history of how they got to this place, the story of God's faithfulness to them. He reviewed the rules for living that God gave them on Sinai to contain the fullness of their new life. Most of all, Moses reminded them that the land they were coming into was pure gift. They were gaining a home not

through their own efforts, but because from the beginning, at every step, God had provided them all that was necessary.

For us to understand that coming into our new home is pure grace changes everything. If buying and renovating the building is not grace, but all our own doing, then we can congratulate ourselves. Then we are free to do whatever we want with it. We answer to nothing outside ourselves and our own preferences are the only thing to guide its use.

If it's gift, then we respond to the gift in gratitude and amazement. If it is gift, then we can be "dazzled" that we have been graced in such a generous way. If the renovated building is our own doing, then we are justified in wanting to secure it, control it and not take risks with it. If it's gift, then we are likely to be drawn to a corresponding generosity, wanting to listen to the Giver's guidance for how the gift is to be used. We move more toward trust in the Giver to give us our sense of security. It is something along these lines that Moses was trying to convey to the Israelites at Jordan.

We at Seekers do not have a Moses: we believe that the prophetic word can come from any one of us. So, as we begin to draw closer to moving into our own new land, and the time comes for us to pause and listen, we'll listen to hear God speaking in the words of each one of us.

In a small way, that is what the rest of the time this morning will be: our listening to what God may be saying in the words of each one of us.

[Following this introduction, other members of the Seekers community reflected on the theme.]