

Getting our Bearings

Before we read the scripture, let's get our bearings. We're looking at this Bible passage in our series on "connecting with one another." This is the second section of our vision statement. We're talking about intentionally connecting with one another as fellow Christians. So we want to look at this Bible story in that light. In this passage, we see some important lessons on being together and we want to focus today on the importance of truthtelling as a community of believers.

Number 13:1-3

¹ The Lord said to Moses, ² "Send some men to explore the land of Canaan, which I am giving to the Israelites. From each ancestral tribe send one of its leaders."

³ So at the Lord's command Moses sent them out from the Desert of Paran. All of them were leaders of the Israelites.

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¹⁷ When Moses sent them to explore Canaan, he said, "Go up through the Negev and on into the hill country. ¹⁸ See what the land is like and whether the people who live there are strong or weak, few or many. ¹⁹ What kind of land do they live in? Is it good or bad? What kind of towns do they live in? Are they unwalled or fortified?

²⁰ How is the soil? Is it fertile or poor? Are there trees in it or not? Do your best to bring back some of the fruit of the land." (It was the season for the first ripe grapes.) ²¹ So they went up and explored the land...

²⁵ At the end of forty days they returned from exploring the land.

²⁶ They came back to Moses and Aaron and the whole Israelite community at Kadesh in the Desert of Paran. There they reported to them and to the whole assembly and showed them the fruit of the land. ²⁷ They gave Moses this account: "We went into the land to which you sent us, and it does flow with milk and honey! Here is its fruit. ²⁸ But the people who live there are powerful, and the cities are fortified and very large. We even saw descendants of Anak there. ²⁹ The Amalekites live in the Negev; the Hittites, Jebusites and Amorites live in the hill country; and the Canaanites live near the sea and along the Jordan." (sounds full!! 😊)

³⁰ Then Caleb silenced the people before Moses and said, "We should go up and take possession of the land, for we can certainly do it."

³¹ But the men who had gone up with him said, "We can't attack those people; they are stronger than we are." ³² And they spread among the Israelites a bad report about the land they had explored. They said, "The land we explored devours those living in it. All the people we saw there are of great size. ³³ We saw the Nephilim there (the descendants of Anak come from the Nephilim). We seemed like grasshoppers in our own eyes, and we looked the same to them."

Chapter 14 That night all the members of the community raised their voices and wept aloud. ² All the Israelites grumbled against Moses and Aaron, and the whole assembly said to them, "If only we had died in Egypt! Or in this wilderness! ³ Why is

the Lord bringing us to this land only to let us fall by the sword? Our wives and children will be taken as plunder. Wouldn't it be better for us to go back to Egypt?"

⁴ And they said to each other, "We should choose a leader and go back to Egypt."

⁵ Then Moses and Aaron fell facedown in front of the whole Israelite assembly gathered there. ⁶ Joshua son of Nun and Caleb son of Jephunneh, who were among those who had explored the land, tore their clothes ⁷ and said to the entire Israelite assembly, "The land we passed through and explored is exceedingly good. ⁸ If the Lord is pleased with us, he will lead us into that land, a land flowing with milk and honey, and will give it to us. ⁹ Only do not rebel against the Lord. And do not be afraid of the people of the land, because we will devour them. Their protection is gone, but the Lord is with us. Do not be afraid of them."

¹⁰ But the whole assembly talked about stoning them...

³⁶ So the men Moses had sent to explore the land, who returned and made the whole community grumble against him by spreading a bad report about it— ³⁷ these men who were responsible for spreading the bad report about the land were struck down and died of a plague before the Lord. ³⁸ Of the men who went to explore the land, only Joshua son of Nun and Caleb son of Jephunneh survived.

This is the Word of the Lord.

Dear children of God,

A man I met recently told me about a family who was basically estranged from their dad. He was a recluse and a hoarder, the way they saw him. They wanted nothing to do with him in life. So when he died, they told their cousin who had a semi-decent connection to their dad, "You take the place, clean it up and sell it. It's all yours. We want nothing to do with dad or his junk." Turns out, however, Dad had about 20 million dollars of junk!

Now picture a family with 12 kids. The parents die and it's time to settle the estate. 10 kids don't think there is much in the estate and aren't ready to put any effort into it. It looks like a lot of work to get the inheritance and not much payout. In fact, they say "It's likely to cost us more than we gain, so we're out." Meanwhile, the other two children trust that their parents have secured a great inheritance for them and they are willing to go and get it, no matter how challenging it might be. And they even encourage the other 10 to change their mind and join them.

In our Bible reading today, God has brought the 12 tribes of Israel out of Egypt after about 400 years of slavery. All the while, he has been promising them a new home. An inheritance. He basically told them that he would hand it to them, almost on a silver platter. But like all gifts, you must receive it to enjoy it. Someone can give you a cheque for \$1,000,000 but you must take it to the bank and cash it before you get the money in your hands. At minimum nowadays, you need to take a picture of it with your phone and upload it to your account. You need to believe the cheque is good, that the giver's account covers the cost. In other words, you need to trust the giver.

Here in Numbers 13, Moses has Israel's 12 representatives at the door of the bank, so to speak. But most of them won't go inside and cash the cheque.

The problem is that 10 of the Israelite spies who go to view the promised inheritance have looked inside the bank windows and decided there are boobytraps all over the place. Boys and girls, do you know what a boobytrap is? It's a funny word, isn't it! Well, let me tell you. A boobytrap is something that is going to hurt you when you touch it. It's kind of like a mousetrap but it's designed for people. Such traps are usually very well hidden so that you don't see them. You just walk into a building and don't expect anything bad to happen. But an enemy has put something like a little button on the ground and as soon as you step on it, the whole place blows up.

The 10 spies in our Bible story like what they see in the land God is promising to give them. They can hardly believe how good it is. The land is very fertile and the fruit and vegetables are abundant and large! But regardless of how good it looks, those 10 spies are certain that God is sending them into a boobytrapped bank that will blow up and kill them and their families as soon as they go in to cash the cheque.

They aren't about to claim that marvelous piece of real estate. Why? Because they are afraid of the dangers they see. Big, strong, numerous inhabitants who, they reason, will most certainly kill them and take their wives and children for themselves. With the men dead, their wives and children will become slaves again. Therefore, they'd be better off if they just go back to their old life as slaves in Egypt where at least the men were not killed en masse.

Now then, from this story, what lessons do we learn about the importance of truth-telling as a community of believers?

1. Our Community Vision

First, the starting point of being a truth-telling community is and must always be following Jesus who is the Way, the Truth and the Life. Our truth-telling as a community revolves around Jesus; it flows from following him together.

The Israelites, of course, were following God—by the pillar of cloud and fire, as pointed out last week. We follow God too, recognizing the fullness of God revealed to us in Jesus. God no longer hidden behind the cloud but God who came to us in the flesh in the person of Jesus. We follow him as the one who binds us together in the truth and makes us a truth-telling community.

The problem in today's story comes when 10 of the 12 spies lose sight of who they are following. Joshua and Caleb hear God's call through Moses to follow his command. Go and check out the land God has promised you. It isn't really up for discussion whether or not Israel is supposed to go to the Promised Land. In Numbers 13:1&2 we read,

Num 13:1 The Lord said to Moses, "Send some men to explore the land of Canaan, which I am giving to the Israelites...."

I am giving that land to Israel, says the Lord. That's a fact. That's the truth. It's a sign of how grace works. God is **giving** it to Israel. And here in Numbers 13 he says, "Now go and check out your new home!"

All 12 spies freely followed this command of the Lord. They are presently living in the desert (see pic). As Gertie pointed out last week, it's hot in the day and cold at night. Some describe it as a vast and dreadful place because the Paran plateau contains a lot of gravel and very little rain. It's dry and dusty. Now picture yourself there, living in tents. Sand everywhere, like camping on the beach for months on end, except there is no lake nearby to cool down in and to wash off. Just sand, scraggly bushes and some wild critters which are usually nasty and hungry. But even in that place, the Lord took care of the Israelites. He gave them small signs of his grace which they didn't always appreciate, but they had food and water every single day.

My point is that one peek of the Promised Land should have been a huge relief to these spies. Who wouldn't want to follow the Lord to that place? Especially when you've been living in the dreadful Desert of Paran!

Now, friends, God has given us many promises in Christ as well. These look pretty good from the vantage point of being enslaved to our sin and the suffering we know in this life. Jesus promises us a life to come where there is no more suffering, pain or death and a renewed creation. But in Christ already now, we are promised new life. Jesus promises us life to the fullest in John 10:10. Abundant life.

Just know that our following Jesus into this new life does not ensure our salvation. Jesus does that. In fact, because he's secured our new life here and forevermore, that's why we seek to follow him! It's gratitude for his goodness and grace to us that unites us and also moves us to follow him together. Because we know the life we have in him is greater than anything this world can offer us, we choose to follow him. The money is in the bank—so to speak—and, by following Jesus, we are going in to collect it. Let it be clear, then, that our togetherness as a truth-telling community is based on Jesus who is the Way, the Truth and the Life. He is the one around whom our community vision is focused.

2. Our Community Obstacle

As attractive as that sounds, we have objections, obstacles or struggles as a truth-telling community. As much as God said to the Israelites that I'm giving you the Promised Land, the majority of the spies don't want to go in. Like the 10 spies, we often see obstacles in the way to following God. Strange people that we are, we often see monsters and cower in fear!

The spies report on seeing the descendants of Anak, relatives of the Nephilim. That's a whole other story that I simply can't get into right now except to say these folks were big. The word *Nephilim* could be translated as "mighty ones" but "fallen ones" is another translation which gives the sense of tough, sin-loving giants. There are lots of imaginative drawings of these men but it's all speculation. In any event, just from reading the story, you can tell that these Nephilim are frightening. And for that reason, 10 spies want nothing to do with the Promised Land.

Maybe it's PTSD. They'd been in Egyptian captivity their whole lives and going to a place of brutal giants seems like going from the frying pan into the fire. If it is just a land flowing with milk and honey—a land of abundance—that's great. But the place is also crawling with people who will not welcome them with open arms. The giants might be the biggest threat but all that the 10 spies see everywhere is hostile nations spread around that land. They report:

Num 13:29 The Amalekites live in the Negev; the Hittites, Jebusites and Amorites live in the hill country; and the Canaanites live near the sea and along the Jordan."

And a few verses later they conclude:

33 "...We seemed like grasshoppers in our own eyes, and we looked the same to them."

The enemies in the land are too big and too numerous for us! They won't follow the Lord's command if it means facing those giants!

Recognize, though, the 10 spies aren't just saying no to the Land. They are saying no to God. They are saying no to following him. That is the real issue. God has saved them from bondage for a good and holy purpose but they just see giants preventing them from receiving God's gift of the Promised Land.

What keeps you from heeding Jesus' call to follow him today into the true life he promises? What makes you afraid to enter more fully into the life of the Kingdom of God?

Is it hard for you, young people, to follow Jesus at school? Do you see "giants" of some kind and get scared? Maybe peer pressure—you gotta do certain things or else the popular crowd is going to make your life miserable. What about those of us in the workforce? Is it the boss who says, "Cut the deal and cut some corners if you want to keep your job."? Or fellow employees expecting you to use crude language to fit in? What other things make following Jesus hard? Is it guys or maybe ladies expecting some 'action' when you go on a date? You know your life better than me. You know where you find it tough to follow Jesus today. What obstacles seem too big when it comes to following Jesus into the new life he's offering us? You know the giants that stand between you and the life of blessing Jesus makes available to us.

Jesus says follow me and then gives us all kinds of counter cultural directions for living—things that make entering into the life he offers us look very difficult. He says things like:

lay down your life for others
it is more blessed to give than to receive
Love your enemies
do good to those who hate you
bless those who curse you,
pray for those who mistreat you
do to other as you would have them do to you.
Love your neighbour as yourself

Believe it or not, when he says these things, he's calling us into the life that is truly life. He's calling us to kingdom living. But that's not a popular way of life in our world. So, I understand that it seems like a gigantic obstacle to overcome.

The real obstacle is fear. Like the 10 spies, we live by fear instead of by faith. We live according to what we see with our eyes instead of what is really true, what God has revealed to us. We live by lies instead of the truth. And that won't serve us well as a community of believers. If we're going to live into the fullness of life as Christ's disciples, we must hear and believe the truth—Jesus and his way of life. We must encourage each other and support each other in following Jesus, regardless of the obstacles.

3. Our Community Power

That brings us to our final point. God has given us to each other and calls us to be a truthtelling community. Being a truthtelling community empowers us to be all that Christ has in store for us. To encourage each other to live by faith. That includes seeing what is true rather than focusing on the enemy. Seeing the promises God is holding out to us, that he is offering us freely as we step into life with Jesus. We need one another to keep ourselves truthful or to expose lies that damage our relationship with Jesus and therefore keep us from stepping into his bank of grace and life.

In the book of Numbers, we find 10 spies who only see the enemy—or what I earlier called the boobytraps in the bank. But we also find Caleb and Joshua who get the kingdom vision and plead with the other 10 spies and the whole congregation to trust God's promise and his leading. Don't listen to the lies born out of fear but trust God's promises and cash them in. That's the truthteller's role!

You see, lies paralyze us! Believing lies is and has always been Satan's strategy to keep people from enjoying the fulness of God's blessing for us here on earth. He deceived Adam and Eve. And it's been the same ever since. He longs to get us to see the enemy instead of the reality of God's bigger, better and victorious kingdom in Christ. In a covenant community, we are called to live by faith. We are called to follow God and trust his promises.

When we know what God is asking of us, we ought to help one another attain it. We must be truthtellers and truth promoters. Not agents of deception. The 10 fearful spies, we read,

“spread among the Israelites a bad report about the land they had explored.”

They said,

“The land we explored devours those living in it.”

They lied because they were afraid and the next thing we read is that the vast majority of the people believed them and became afraid too. In fact, chapter 14:4 reads,

Num 14:4 And they said to each other, “We should choose a leader and go back to Egypt.”

But, thanks be to God, Caleb and Joshua stood up to their fearful brothers and to the whole community that supported the liars. They declared the truth in the face of the lie. They spoke against fear with faith. They pointed the people away from enemy and toward the Lord. V.30 says,

Num 13:30 Then Caleb silenced the people before Moses and said, “We should go up and take possession of the land, for we can certainly do it.”

He wasn't suggesting that they could do it in their own strength. In fact, he and Joshua say to the people,

Num 14:7b "The land we passed through and explored is exceedingly good. ⁸ If the Lord is pleased with us, he will lead us into that land, a land flowing with milk and honey, and will give it to us. ⁹ Only do not rebel against the Lord. And do not be afraid of the people of the land, because we will devour them. Their protection is gone, but the Lord is with us. Do not be afraid of them."

They are speaking as the Apostle Paul spoke to the Philippian Church when we said,

Phil 4:13 I can do all things through Christ who gives me strength.

Such is the blessing of the truth-tellers among us.

Our calling as Christians is to live by the truth because, as Jesus said, *the truth will set you free*. Churches must be truthful. Even when the truth is embarrassing or distressing or hard to live out, we must not act on fear. We must not try to cover up anything; that's promoting a lie. Instead, we must be honest about promoting the life that Jesus offers us and helping one another attain it in the way Jesus teaches. Even when that requires sacrifice or facing something that seems fearful, we must promote the truth.

It can be fearful to stand up to bullies. It can be fearful to call out corruption in the workplace when it appears to be mainstream. It can be fearful to do good quality work for the sake of the customer when your company expects you to cut corners in order to save them money. It can be fearful to say "Not till I'm married" in a society that might call you a prude. It can be fearful giving generously to help the poor when your neighbours are saying you need to tuck more away for retirement. You get the picture. It can be fearful to do the right thing when everyone is encouraging you to do the opposite. It can be fearful to live by the truth of the kingdom of God.

But it becomes less fearful when you're not alone. When you're Caleb with Joshua beside you, you have the support of a truth-telling community. Together with our sisters and brothers in Christ, we can turn to Christ for strength in the face of our fears and obstacles.

For months now, you've heard us talking about small groups. Why? Because we need one another to help us become our best in Christ. We'll never know the fullest life possible in Christ on this side of the grave. But we need help from our sisters and brothers to get as close as we can.

Honesty happens best in a place where we know we are loved by Christ who is the Truth incarnate. It happens best when we know we are loved in the community that bears his name and lives by his grace. Accountability with strangers isn't the same. When we love each other so much that we can't lie to another, that's amazing. That's the power of Christ in us.

That power enables us to love each other enough to call out the sin we're harbouring or the faithlessness out of which we act. All for the love of our church family. That's how Caleb lovingly pleaded with his fellow Israelites to follow the Lord and go into the land. More often than calling out sin, the power of being Christ's

truthtelling community is supporting and encouraging one another to live by the truth of the kingdom of God when we're all being bombarded with lies all around us. A loving community is able to help us live by faith instead of by fear. John writes,

1 Jn 4:18 There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment.

Having our hearts filled with the love of Christ enables us to love one another better as part of the truthtelling community.

Brothers and sisters, we belong to Christ and in him we belong to one another. He is the Truth and calls us to be truthtellers—motivated by faith, not fear. In this way, we can enjoy the life of the kingdom which is life to the fullest, even when that is challenging at times.

SUNDAY WORSHIP

October 17, 2021 10am

Livestream on Youtube at trinitychurchedmonton
On Channel 716 at Emmanuel Home

GOD CALLS US TO WORSHIP

Welcome

Pastor Rich

Opening Prayer

* Call to Worship: Psalm 133

* God's Greeting

* Gathering Songs: *The Church's One Foundation*
Only a Holy God

LUYH 251:1,2,4,5

WE RENEW RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD

Prayer of Confession

Assurance of Forgiveness: Lord's Supper preparatory

God's Will for Our Lives

Song: *By Faith*

GOD GIVES US HIS WORD

Children's Message

Pastor Hilary

* Children's Song: *The Trees of the Field*
Wee Worship children dismiss

Prayer for the Word

Pastor Rich

Scripture Reading: Numbers 13:1 – 14:38 selections

Sermon: ***A Truthtelling Community***

RESPONDING TO GOD'S WORD

* Song: *Come People of The Risen King*

Tithes & Offerings

1. Trinity Ministries

2. Friendship Ministries

Congregational Prayer

GOD SENDS US IN HIS STRENGTH

* God's Parting Blessing

* Sending Song: *Shout to the North*