

**Michael Gehring**  
**“A Divine Mandate”**  
**Deuteronomy 6: 1-9**  
**Main Street UMC, Kernersville, NC**  
**August 26, 2018**

The context of the Scripture passage read this morning is this. The Israelites are standing on the edge of the promised land. It's been a long journey to get to this point. Sometimes the journey didn't make sense. Sometimes they seemed to be traveling in circles, but here they are at last. Can you imagine what Moses is thinking? A little more than 40 years before he was tending sheep in the fields and 40 years before that he was a prince of Egypt. None of us know how our lives will go with all the twists and turns that will be taken. How God's mysterious ways frustrate the long-term planners!

Can you imagine what the Israelite slaves thought when their one-time foe (Moses) appears on the scene saying that the God known as *I am* has sent me here to liberate you? Trust this God and we'll get out of this place of suffering. And they did crossing the sea and living off manna in the wilderness. When Moses stayed up on that mountain too long, the people got restless, anxious, and let their fear drive them into idolatry. Rather than trusting in God who they could not see, they bowed down to a golden calf fashioned by their own hands.

And now here they are, all that is in the past. They are standing on the cusp of a new day about to enter the promised land. The Book of Deuteronomy has within it three sermons by Moses. If I preached as long as Moses did in these sermons, you would need to bring not only your lunch, but also dinner, a bedtime snack, and breakfast for the morning.

Moses is setting the stage for a transition in leadership and he is instructing the people to remember who delivered them from Pharaoh and who has brought them to this promised land. He tells them to remember who they are and whose they are. And he's giving them educational instructions and methods. Moses said God told me to teach you to observe his commandments as you are about to cross into this land of abundance. Teach your children and your children's children the Shema: "Hear O Israel the Lord our God is one. And you are to love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, and might. You are to keep these words. Recite them to your children, bind them on your hands, put them as an emblem on your forehead, fasten them to the door of your house and to its gates." On the verge of entering into the land of plenty, God doesn't want them to forget their spiritual center.

You know it's so easy to do that. It was easy then and it's so much easier now. We got technology in the palm of our hands, an infinite opportunity of entertainment and distraction. Rather than binding God's law to our hands we have instead tightly grasped the iPhone.

It's so easy to lose track of our center and the challenge of raising children in this culture is so much more difficult than ever before. You've heard the old African proverb, "It takes a village to raise a child." There is so much truth in that and it definitely takes a church to raise a child, even though some parishioners are not tuned into that.

Maxie Dunham told this story. "Two small boys went into the dentist's office one day and waited for the dentist to get through with his appointment. When he came into the waiting room, the older of the two boys spoke up. 'Doctor, I want a tooth taken out, and I don't want any gas, and I don't want it deadened because we're in a hurry.' The doctor smiled, and said, 'Well, you're quite a brave young man. You want a tooth pulled, and you don't want any gas, and you don't want it deadened.' And the little boy said, 'That's right, 'cause we're in a hurry.' 'Well okay,' said the dentist, 'but tell me, which tooth is it?' And the little boy turned to his smaller friend and said, 'Show him your tooth, Albert!'" (*Perceptions*, 21)

What is important to note in Moses' instruction is that he's not simply placing the responsibility of teaching this faith on individuals; he's placing it in the hands of the faith community as well. And we need to remember this. It's not just Katie's job or Wayne's job to teach the children and the youth of the church the faith. It's the responsibility of the entire church. It's not just the parents' task to teach this faith to their children. It's the community's responsibility as well. It's not just the parents' responsibility to be Sunday School teachers for the children or workers in VBS; it's the community's obligation as well.

Have you ever had a moment in your life you wanted to freeze frame? Stop the gears of time. Just live into the fullness of that moment. I've often thought that if the Protestant Church could choose a moment it would be in the 1950's. America had won the war, and the economy was booming. The Christian church was celebrated by culture. Protestant theologians graced the cover of *Time* magazine. Newspapers printed sermons from prominent preachers. Everyone took it for granted that America was a Christian nation. And some say that all you had to do was swing open the doors of the church, and people would crowd into that sacred space.

Whatever happened to those days? The days when everyone knew they needed to go to church, and if they didn't, they were sheepish about it. Blue laws kept people from shopping and going to the movies. 11:00 am Sunday morning worship was the only game in town. That's why you see so

many large sanctuaries in our downtown cities like Winston-Salem, Greensboro, and Charlotte. The churches weren't having 4 or 5 services on Sunday morning. More times than not there was just one service at 11 am and everyone came to it.

Whatever happened to those days? We don't need Bob Dylan singing "the times are a changing" to know how different our world is from generations ago. It's so much more challenging now to do church and it's so much more difficult to raise a child as a Christian in this culture.

Some years back I was in the Dublin Tourism Center on Suffolk Street buying some t-shirts and what nots for my family. Buying things for them that I think are cool, knowing full well they'll never wear them because my sense of fashion is so un-hip. I'm in this Tourism center, really feeling comfortable in the building. And then I look around, and I think, of course I feel comfortable in this building. This is my kind of space. It used to be a church, more specifically St. Andrews Church. No wonder I feel comfortable. We at Main Street don't want to end up some day as a cultural museum. We want to remain a life-saving station.

You see the church doesn't exist so that we can be a country club. The church exists so that we can build a bridge to those homes where drug addiction is out of control and the only stability those kids in it will have is the rock of Christ. That's what we should be about: building bridges to people who feel unloved and share with them about God's amazing love, to build bridges to people who have lost all hope and give them the anchor of Christ.

The work before us is steep, because we inhabit a culture which is post-Christian. But even though the culture has changed, the Divine Mandate has not. Deuteronomy commands us to teach the faith to our children and our children's children.