

SERMON Parashat Pinchas – 18 Tammuz 5780 July 10, 2020

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WHAT WE INHERIT

My parents were the type of parents who when they would get really made at us as adults, they would cut us out of the will. It was usually about who we were marrying, or some perceived insult that we weren't even aware of. At different times, all three of us were out of the will, and all three of us were promoted to Executor. When they died, I was the only one in the will. I decided to honor their goodness more than their tantrum, and so my siblings and I divided things fairly. What was funny was that my parents didn't have that much to leave us in the will; they were always middle middle-class with little ranch homes and three kids.

Tim had a terrible time dealing with his parents will, and I have talked to many of you who have had family trauma about what you would or would not inherit and how the family handled the process.

It is a VERY sensitive matter, one that feels like we are being given a score of our value when we can no longer say anything back or heal the relationship.

It is also a time when we can either fill 'in' the family or 'out' of the family. For humans, it matters a great deal to us whether we are 'in' with our circle of humans. We don't survive well alone, despite countless TV reality shows or action-movies that seem to say we can. Humans survive because we use our minds to cooperate in groups and pool our resources. If we are out of the group, we are existentially threatened. And even as modern people, being left out of a will hurts.

This week's Torah portion includes the story of the Daughters of Zelophehad who had been left out of the national inheritance. Because they were women, they weren't allowed to inherit; they were left out of the will. These five women, though, didn't accept this. Instead, they organized and marched up to the men in charge, and demanded that they be included in the inheritance, that they get their fair portion of the wealth and land of the country.

In a surprising turn, Moses having set the rule before that said they couldn't, decides to go and ask God who says, "they're right. They should inherit."

If only it were that easy. *Apparently, even when God agrees with you, there can be long legal fights to get your fair share.* It can take centuries for the promise of the inheritance to be actually given.

The daughters of Zelophehad are still demanding.

- When groups of people rise up to demand their inheritance, it is the spirit of those women in them.
- When people organize to demand a fair inheritance, to have their work valued, to be respected as part of the people, the daughters marched with them.
- When women rose up to demand their fair inheritance, to be respected as half the people, the daughters marched with them.
- When LGBT people marched to demand a fair inheritance, to inherit the rights and freedom of other people, the daughters marched with them.

Today, the black community is still marching to get the inheritance that was promised to us. Brought here as slaves, against their will, and violently abused, the wealth of this nation was built on their hard labor. There is no America as we know it without the terrible sin of slavery, and yet they have inherited only the dream of freedom and equality. In reality, they have not gotten their fair share of the wealth they built in a nation that kidnapped and enslaved them. Now the descendants of those slaves and other people of color are marching into the centers of power and demanding their inheritance as Americans. They are saying "we are part of this people and this nation, and we deserve our inheritance."

The daughters march with them.

But there is another sort of inheritance we get from our families that shapes how we see the world: our narratives, our stories.

Some of us are raised on stories that tell us we deserve our inheritance, that our ancestors sacrificed, pulled themselves up by their bootstraps and gave up everything, braved incredible difficulties and dangers to establish themselves as

part of this place, and we, like the daughters, deserve to be included in the nation, to get our inheritance.

Some of us are raised on stories that our ancestors had it all, but then other people, “those people” came and tried to take it from us, take our culture and history, and we stood our ground and kept them out.

Those two stories are as ancient as the Daughters of Zelophehad. They are still very much alive, and this inheritance of story shapes how we see the daughters when they come to us to ask us to share our inheritance fairly with them.

Our story, the TORAH, teaches us a story that all people are made in the image of God. Our story teaches that newcomers that want to join you, respect your values and be part of the place should be treated fairly and part of one system of law.

Our story, The Torah, teaches us that we were slaves in Egypt, but that we deserved freedom, and that we should not oppress others because we know the heart of the oppressed.

Our story tells us that Five Women

– Mahlah, Noa, Hoglah, Milcah, and Tirzah –

Marched up to those in power, demanded their inheritance, and God was on their side.

So are we.

Shabbat shalom.