

NOT ALL WHO WANDER ARE LOST

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Rev. Lori Fleming

Rev. Lori Fleming: My talk is entitled, "Not All Who Wander are Lost." On Friday, I was driving on the 101 and I saw an RV: one of those fifth wheels. And it had a tire on the back of it, and the tire said: "Not all who wander are lost." I took that as a sign!

Now, you may have seen this saying on coffee cups or T-shirts or plaques. However, that's not exactly how the saying goes. This saying comes from *The Fellowship of the Ring* book series by J. R. R. Tolkien. These are lines in a poem about Aragorn by Gandalf the Wizard in his letter to Frodo, and offers The Hobbit a means to determine if Strider is indeed Aragorn, the king who's lost his throne. Here's the poem in full:

"Not all that is gold does glitter."

And that's a direct quotation from Shakespeare!

*"Not all that is gold does glitter.
Not all those who wander are lost.
The old that is strong does not wither.
Deep roots are not reached by the frost.*

*From the ashes a fire shall be woken,
A light from the shadows shall spring;
Renewed shall be blade that was broken;
The crownless again shall be king."*

And that's how he knows that Strider is Aragorn, because the blade of his sword is broken, and he will be king again.

Throughout all of Tolkien's books, each character is wandering around looking for something outside himself or herself: wandering, but not truly lost. Looking for some material possession like a ring or a crown or something that was lost or deserved ... like Aragon looking to return to his rightful place on the throne.

This is the classic hero's journey: the journey of leaving home, going out into the world where there are perils and lessons. Where you have to rely on yourselves – do what you have to do – looking for the "boon" or the treasure. Sometimes lose the treasure, or even discover there was no treasure! And always return home as a changed being: tested, tried, battle-scarred and worn. Ahhh ... but with new understanding and new skills and a new consciousness. Because not all those who wander are lost.

This poem on the surface is about Aragorn, the rightful heir to Gondor. But it's also about how we lose our way. And we all do, at some point! How we can bounce back and get back on track with that new understanding and those new skills, better able to meet the challenges in the future.

No one intends to get off track; it just happens, because that's how life is. Sometimes we're just distracted by that nice, shiny object: you know, a toy to play with, a new car, a new computer, new clothes, new house, new relationship. As we wander, sometimes we lose our way because we take the path of least resistance: the easy way out, instead of doing our inner work. Or we let someone else make the decision for us; we do what our parents want us to do ... not what we want to do in our heart of hearts.

But even the path of least resistance brings its own lessons! In the Tolkien poem, we see that we have a great destiny ahead of us. Without motivation to claim what is ours, we have no real life purpose. No one accomplishes their dreams by sitting on the back burner! Even though it may seem we're

wandering, we really are not lost; Spirit always has a way of helping us circle back around to do what's ours to do, nudging us with spiritual guidance and intuition to keep us on track.

One of the greatest wanderers in the Bible were the Israelites, led by Moses. The story starts in the Book of Exodus; it's quite a saga, like *The Iliad* or other great stories. It's over several books of the Bible. The Israelites are enslaved in Egypt; they're being held in bondage – simply living a life of Cause and Effect -- getting up every day doing hard, manual labor. And Moses goes to Pharaoh and says, "*Let my people go!*" Pharaoh responds by telling the people that, not only do they have to make the same number of bricks every day, but now they have to go out and get their own straw. A harsh punishment!

When we're caught up in a situation like this, it seems like we're on a merry-go-round, and we can't get off! We don't see a solution, so we keep on gathering straw and working extra hours to make our bricks. Every day is the same: work, work, work. There's no time for introspection. No time for inner work that will help us use our intuition to live our lives better.

But at some point, something awakens within us, because Spirit is calling us higher. Spirit is working in our hearts and in our minds. And a "Moses" character comes into our lives and leads us out of bondage. That person might be a friend, a neighbor, a teacher, a minister, a coach or a mentor.

Moses, metaphysically, means "drawing out": extracting out water. Moses represents this "drawing out" process, which works from within our being outward. Moses represents our development in consciousness of growth ... not of seeming negative conditions, represented by Egypt.

Moses has to grow up in Egypt to learn how to handle his personal life: his senses his appetites -- before he can go into the wilderness and into the Promised Land. Those things we all have to master as we grow into a mature adult. This is spiritual unfoldment, and it's exacerbated by living in negative circumstances: living in bondage in Egypt.

Egypt, metaphysically, means darkness; mystery; obscurity; a land of sense or material or body consciousness. Many people first come to Unity when they're experiencing negative circumstances in their lives: a health challenge, maybe, or a loss of a loved one or poverty ... some kind of problem. They learn Unity principles, and they start to practice them, and their lives get better. This is spiritual evolution; this is our own coming into our own Promised Land, represented by the Israelites.

Metaphysically, the Israelites represent illumined thoughts and consciousness which are undergoing spiritual discipline. As we move out of our own Egypt -- or sense and material consciousness and bondage -- into a higher spiritual consciousness, we can also move into our own Promised Land, where not all those who wander are lost.

The story begins in Exodus 3, when the king of Egypt dies. And the Lord comes to Moses in the form of a theophany. A theophany is when God comes to us in the form of something physical, like when God came to Adam and walked and talked with him in the Garden. In Moses' case, the theophany was: Moses saw the Lord in the burning bush. You may remember that story.

The Lord says to Moses, "*I have observed the misery of my people who are in Egypt. I have heard their cry on account of their taskmasters. Indeed, I know their sufferings, and I have come down to deliver them from the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land into a good a broad land: a land flowing with milk and honey.*" This is a prosperity promise! "*So come, Moses; I will send you to bring my people, the Israelites, out of Egypt.*"

And what does Moses say? "*Who ... me? Are you talkin' to me?*" The Lord tells Moses that the Lord will be with him every step of the way, and will give Moses signs and words to speak. And this is exactly what happens along the way: the Lord whispers in Moses' ear all that he is to say to the people. The Lord shows Moses how to throw down his staff, and it turns into a snake. He shows Moses how to throw down his staff, and it turns into water, and all kinds of other miracles!

Moses tells God, the Lord, that he's not an eloquent speaker, and that he's slow of tongue. *"Please, Lord, send someone else!"* How many times have we received an idea – an inkling, a whisper from the Holy Spirit – that we're to do something, and yet we ignore it? How many times have we received some kind of divine intuition, and we were afraid to act on it? We sell ourselves short, believing we're not worthy, or we're just too busy or afraid of what other people will think.

I knew that I was supposed to go to seminary and become a minister long before I went to seminary. Like Moses, I told myself, *"Who would want to listen to me?"* Besides, I had small children at home; I didn't want to leave them to go away to school. So what did I do? I taught Sunday school and I worked with the teenagers for more than 15 years. That was a wonderful preparation for going into ministry!

What is Spirit you to do? Listen carefully; you have the ears to hear. If God is calling you to do something, the way will be made to do it, because not all those who wander are lost.

So the Lord and Moses agree that the Lord will tell Moses what to say, and Moses will tell his brother, Aaron, and Aaron will tell the people. Because God is a good and loving God for makes allowances for all our foibles. Who works with us just as we are, faults and all! Because God only sees in us our infinite perfection, and holds that ideal as a model in God's Mind for who we can become. Who better to imagine our perfection into being than God?

Moses goes to Pharaoh and asks him to let the Israelites go, and Pharaoh refuses. A series of plagues and misfortunes follows the Egyptian people, caused by the Lord through the agency of Moses. Pharaoh's bathing in the Nile, and the Lord instructs Moses to lift his staff and turn the Nile into blood. And it kills all the fish and no one can drink it. Water is life; no one can live without fresh water. Still, Pharaoh will not let his people go. The Lord instructs Moses to stretch his staff over the river, and frogs come up and cover the land. Still, Pharaoh will not let the Israelites go. The Lord sends gnats; still Pharaoh will not let the Israelites go. Then biting flies! And still Pharaoh will not let the Israelites go.

Finally, after many trials and tribulation, Pharaoh lets Moses go to the wilderness and sacrifice to the Lord and pray ... if Moses will agree to get rid of the flies. So Moses takes time away; he goes to the wilderness. He makes his sacrifice to the lord. He spends time in prayer and meditation, feeding his spirit. And he asks the Lord to remove the swarm of flies from Pharaoh. And the Lord does as Moses asks. Moses is deepening his relationship with the Lord and, yet, still Pharaoh will not let the Israelites go. The Lord sends pestilence and the Egyptian livestock dies ... but not the Israelite livestock; they live. And still Pharaoh will not let the Israelites go! Then there's hail, a swarm of locusts and, finally, darkness. And still, Pharaoh will not let the Israelites go.

Finally, in Chapter 12, Verse 31, Pharaoh relents and tells the Israelites to take everything and leave Egypt. And thus the Exodus begins. Remember: all those who wander are not lost. And as they leave, an angel of the Lord goes before them in a pillar of cloud, leading them on the way. And at night an angel of the Lord is a pillar of fire, providing them light and leading them on the way. This is divine protection and guidance for God's people, because God will always lead us in the right direction if we watch the signs. If we pray and we meditate, and grow our relationship with God, we'll always know the right thing to do.

When the king of Egypt was told that Pharaoh has told the Israelites to leave, they both realize they've just let their free labor leave! So they take 600 chariots and go after the Israelites. The number six, metaphysically, means a perception of duality, or a belief in forces that oppose God. And adding a zero multiplies it. The Israelites were afraid, and said it would be better to return to Egypt and serve there than die in the wilderness. Isn't that just like it is when we're up to something big? Fear comes in and tries to stop us!

When we get on our hero's journey, there's always a time when things get just a little bit dicey. We get scared or we get injured, or we think we've lost our way. We start to think it would be better to go back to our old life. We think that the old -- as bad as it was -- has to be better than the unknown ... because, in the unknown, anything can happen. Maybe it wasn't so bad after all, gathering up straw and making our quota of bricks from morning to night in the blazing sun!

But when things get really hard, we can trust in God. When we don't see a way, God has a way! A way we may not have thought of. We have to trust, and we have to have faith. And we have to keep praying and knowing that an answer will come.

The Israelites are now being chased by Pharaoh's 600 chariots. You may have seen the Charlton Heston movie about Moses, and the scene at the Red Sea. The chariots are coming full speed; the horses are galloping and kicking up dust. The noise was deafening, and the Israelites were terrified. But the Lord tells Moses to raise his magic staff, and the waters of the Red Sea part, and the Israelites can travel safely through to the other side. And the 600 chariots come charging after the Israelites, and when the water returns, it drowns them all.

The Red Sea appeared as an obstacle they couldn't get through. It turned out to be the channel of their greater freedom. How many times in our lives have we encountered an obstacle: something that seemed like we couldn't get over it, around it, under it or through it? Maybe we were even tempted to give up: to go back to the Egypt, to the familiar. Or maybe we took it to prayer, and then listened to the guidance we were given.

The Red Sea is water, and represents dissolving and cleansing. The Egyptian army symbolizes negative and threatening appearances and habits. The army represents memories or teachings that are holding us back, keeping us from progressing to a higher level of spiritual understanding. The waters of the Red Sea dissolve, cleanse and sweep these negative thoughts and feelings and ideas away. And the Israelites are free to wander in the wilderness for 40 years.

The number 4 means a foundation: the time it takes for preparation. And when you add a zero, it's like multiplying it. The Israelites had to be in the wilderness for 40 years, because that's how long it takes for the old people -- representing old ideas -- to die out so that a new consciousness can be born. They couldn't move into the Promised Land until they built a spiritual foundation and consciousness that allowed them to move forward.

All through their trials in the wilderness, the Lord continued to speak through Moses and his brother, Aaron. When the people were hungry, the Lord sent quail to eat in the evening. He sent manna in the morning. Manna, metaphysically, represents the bread of life, or the Word of God. It represents the realization that divine substance is everywhere present, and in every part of our consciousness.

Manna was this white, powdery substance that was on the ground every morning. It was sweet and nutritious; they were allowed to gather just enough for one day. If they kept it for a second day, it rotted, except on the day before the Sabbath. On the day before the Sabbath, they were supposed to collect enough for two days, and it did not spoil, because God wanted them to keep the Sabbath as a holy day. The Lord did not let his people go hungry, and he provided for them. The Lord wanted them to establish a day of rest, so they could pray and meditate and renew their relationship with God, because they were his chosen people.

All during the time of wandering in the wilderness, the Lord tells Moses what to say, and Moses follows God's guidance always. At the end of the Book of Deuteronomy, Moses dies in Moab at the age of 120 years: still in good health. The Lord has simply called him home, because his work is done. Moses did not live long enough to go into the Promised Land. He was eulogized as being unequalled for the signs and wonders the Lord sent him to perform in the land of Egypt, and for all the mighty deeds, and for all the terrifying displays of power that Moses performed in the sight of Israel.

When we wander, we can always rely on God for guidance. Sometimes that guidance comes through maps or our GPS on our phone. It can come from friends or strangers we encounter along the way.

In Deuteronomy Chapter 8, Verse 2 to 3, the Israelites were led by God into the wilderness for 40 years to humble them, testing them to know what was in their hearts, and whether they would keep the Lord's commandments. And they had some trouble doing that! The Lord humbled them by letting them hunger, and feeding them manna – which they were not familiar with – to teach them they could not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes out of the mouth of the Lord.

We all acquire spiritual food for our soul's nourishment and unfoldment. The Lord was bringing them into a good land filled with abundance and prosperity with the caveat that they keep the commandments and grow their relationship with God.

My friends, as we continue on this journey we call life, we know that not all those who wander are lost. That life is a journey – not a destination – of cleansing our consciousness. No matter how long it takes – 40 days or 40 years in the wilderness – we're never truly lost. Our own wilderness experience is about the time it takes us to prepare ourselves into the Promised Land. And when we get there, we will experience peace and love and joy and prosperity.

Abundant blessings!

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