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Obstacles. They come in all shapes and sizes. We all face them.

They are nothing new. The children of Israel encountered many on their trek from Egypt to the Promised Land.

Henry Ford said, **“Obstacles are those frightful things you see when you take your eyes off your goals.”**

And this is exactly what the children of Israel did again and again. They took their focus off God, His promises and the land God had promised to give them. Instead, they looked only at the obstacles in the path just before them.

No doubt you have face obstacles in your life. Perhaps you are facing some very big ones at this present time. Don't feel like the Lone Ranger. Don't think you have fallen out of the reach of the love and care of God.

Let's go back to the children of Israel. Today's Old Testament passage finds them on their final approach to the Promised Land. They are in Kadesh.

This is the second time they have been there. Thirty-eight years earlier they had come to this place, poised to enter the land God had promised to give them.

What prevented them from going in?

In a word – unbelief. You might remember the story. Moses sent 12 spies into the land. Ten came back with a bad report. Full of gloom and doom, they said:

“We can't possibly go in and take control of this land. The people are too big. They are like giants and we are like grasshoppers.”

The other two spies, Joshua and Caleb, came back with a very different report. They told the people it was a good land and with God's help it could be theirs.

To whom did the people listen? The ten or the two?

I think you guessed the answer even if you have forgotten this particular Bible story.

They listened to the ten. They succumbed to unbelief. Because of which, that whole generation was denied entry into the Promised Land. Only Joshua and Caleb were excepted.

Their offspring, the second generation that came out of Egypt, however, would enter the land. This much God promised.

I am reminded of a quote by Golda Meir:

“Let me tell you something that we Israelis have against Moses. He took us 40 years through the desert in order to bring us to the one spot in the Middle East that has no oil!”

They were indeed in the desert 40 years, but it was not Moses’ doing. It was God’s, and it was because of their unbelief.

But, as Number 20 opens – the chapter from which this morning’s Old Testament reading comes – those 40 years are drawing to an end. Once again, they are in Kaddish and poised to enter the Promised Land.

Had all obstacles been removed from the path leading into the Promised Land? Could they go merrily skipping in?

NO! More obstacles awaited them.

And isn’t that the way it is in our own lives? We get over one hurdle, and we think we have ‘arrived’, but then something else comes along.

That is why we need God at our side, day by day, moment by moment. Alone, we are not able to navigate the obstacles that lie before us.

In the case of the children of Israel, two obstacles are highlighted in Numbers, chapter 20.

The first is **unbelief from within the camp**. Before we picked up reading, the people found themselves in a desert place with no water.

Their need was real, but their response was that of the generation that had by this time almost passed from the scene.

What did that do? They railed against God and Moses for bringing them into such a place.

“Would God that we had died when our brethren died before the Lord!” they cried out.

Again, their need was real and God graciously met that need. He told Moses to get his rod – the sign of his authority -- and go and speak to a certain rock. When he did, water would come gushing out.

Moses partially obeyed God and partially did not. He got his rod and went to the rock, but instead of speaking to it as God had commanded, he struck it two times.

God was gracious and provided the people water to drink, but rebuked Moses for his disobedience.

More than that, he said that neither Moses nor Aaron would enter the Promised Land. (Aaron was apparently complicit in this act of disobedience.)

Even Moses and Aaron were not exempt from obstacles in the roadway of life. They too remind us to stay close to God and to travel with Him.

The obstacle of unbelief was internal. But, as they were preparing for this second and final approach into the Promised Land, they also faced an external obstacle.

It came from Edom, their own kinsmen. The people of Edom, you see, were descendants of Esau, the brother of the patriarch Jacob, also known as Israel.

In today’s reading, we find the leader of Edom refusing to give them passage through his territory.

This obstacle of not being able to take the most direct approach towards the Promised Land must have been discouraging for God’s people.

Nevertheless, God was bigger than the challenge. He led them around Edom, and eventually they got to the place they needed to be to cross over into the Promised Land.

Some of the obstacles we face in life are internal as was the case with the children of Israel's unbelief. Others are external as with Edom.

Both are real and still very much with us. The good news is that that God is greater than both.

He can turn obstacles into opportunities.

Which is to say . . . don't expect an obstacle-free way in life.

Some people seem to face more obstacles than others.

Just this past week, I heard about a lady who was getting over quite a serious illness which required a number of days in hospital. Then, no sooner than she had got out of hospital and was getting back on her feet, she had an automobile accident and found herself back in hospital.

Sometimes things like this happen, and we don't know why. No doubt, one day we will have the opportunity to ask God.

But in the meantime, we must not let obstacles, internal or external, small or great, defeat us. Rather, we must put our hand into the hand of God and let Him lead us around them.

When we do this, obstacles can become opportunities for growth and indeed in some cases for salvation, as the story I am about to tell you will show.

Earlier I quoted Golda Meir. She was quite a remarkable woman, Israel's fourth prime minister and the only woman to have served in that position. We might say she was Israel's Margaret Thatcher . . . a real "Iron Lady".

In the late '70s, though, this one who had stood so strong for her nation faced a huge personal obstacle.

She was diagnosed with Lymphoma, a serious blood malignancy.

Out from this this obstacle, something remarkable happened. It was her gateway to coming to personal faith in Israel's Messiah . . . the one we Christians know as Jesus Christ.

It came about like this. Her radiologist Dr. Larry Samuels was a devout Christian. In her last days, he shared with her his faith. She received his witness and prayed to receive Jesus as her Lord and Saviour. The hope of Israel became hers in reality. She found the One whose day Moses saw from afar.

Obstacles. We all face them.

What are you doing with the ones in your life?

Are you letting them defeat you?

Are you letting them make you bitter and miserable?

You don't have too. God is bigger than them all. Let Him turn them into opportunities in your life.

Put Him to the test and prepare to be amazed.