

The word is very near to you

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Deuteronomy is a book of words, a book of preaching and exhortation offered as the word of God. It is made up of words given by leaders to the people before they are to form a new nation, establish homes, plant vineyards, dig wells.

Pierre Bourdieu said that there are no innocent words. The words found in our reading from Deuteronomy are embedded in the dialogue between Jesus and the lawyer, lending credence to what is inherited by word of mouth, by witness, and by practice.

*Power and privilege* are words of argument these days. There is much discussion and critical analysis of what it means to be--or want to be--a person of power and privilege. And there is now a full-force backlash as well: *I have earned the right to my power and I will take the privileges, the status I have earned or inherited.*

How can we be assured that our motives serve the greater good, something beyond our own interests? This is Jesus' point--and the Deuteronomy reading's, which is probably why Jesus knows it so well. Who is our neighbor, and when did such a question become so complex? The whole of Deuteronomy holds the tension of change, of shifting circumstances--it is, after all, a proclamation bound in the intimacy of nearness.

Complexity comes about often because we think where we are and what is happening is the endpoint. We remain entrenched in that ninth verse, the one that promises that we will prosper. When it appears this is not the case, we lose faith. If I

am faithful--so we read--then I will have all that I want and all that I need.

I've been guilty of importing my desire into the text, as if it were about satisfying my desires. It's easy to do in a consumer society. The lovely couple in the speedy sports car, the joyous family in a remodeled kitchen, the next advanced degree: these are our rewards for following the rules, working hard, taking tests, achieving the credentials. We work too hard for this reward on our own terms.

Our text reminds us that we don't have to cross the sea for God's blessing. But we go anyhow--cruise ship or plane, we flit and fly to where we might find that blessing, instead of claiming the promise that it is right there within us, written upon our hearts.