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“Moses’ Vision, and Ours”

Deuteronomy 34:1-12; Matthew 22:34-40

Well, this is only my THIRD Sunday in the ‘new reality’ of sharing of pastoral responsibilities with the Welsh church, and I am already doing what I scoffed at those for questioning if I was going to do: PREACH TWO DIFFERENT MESSAGES ON THE SAME DAY! Because a significant number of that congregation was going to be out for last week’s observance of the 500th Anniversary of the Protestant Reformation, which was to include the same ‘Readers Theatre’ and bagpipes that we SO enjoyed, we made the executive decision to ‘postpone’ the observance of that most significant event in the life of our Reformed... Presbyterian... faith to this Sunday. And while some of you might have enjoyed a second ‘taste’ of that ‘delicious’ celebration... kind of like the ‘leftovers’ of a Thanksgiving meal... I instead decided to deliver a message on the lectionary passage from Deut.

And yet, in the same way that we are to look back at those pioneers of our Reformed faith... like Luther, Calvin, Knox, Zwingli, and many others... who have sacrificed so much in order to help us to grow as faithful followers of “The One True God,” we can also look back even further to learn some of the same lessons of faith. And in particular, today we will consider the example of **Moses**. What did he do, as those ‘Reformers’ to follow him, to ‘rock the status quo?’ And at the same time, hold true to the historic faith of HIS ancestors... Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob? As we consider the words of Scripture... that ‘lens’ through which we can better understand God’s will and purposes... what is God saying to us about **“Moses Vision, and Ours.”**

We pick up in this 34th Chapter of Deuteronomy with the Lord leading Moses up to the top of Mount Nebo, which overlooks the long-awaited “Promised land.” That “Land of Milk and Honey” in which the Jews... God’s “Chosen people” so faithfully and patiently led by Moses... would come to experience God’s **presence** and **peace** in ways like no other, **safe** and **secure** from all life’s trials and persecutions. It was the promise of this earthly place of refuge and

rejuvenation that had, in no small part, kept Moses going through the long years of wandering in the wilderness.

And when God has finished showing Moses this great expanse of lush, fertile valleys and majestic mountains... that destination that this great leader had sought after for SO long... what does God say? ***"I have let you see it with your eyes, but you shall not cross over there."*** (Deut. 34:4) Say WHAT?! Is this some sort of Cosmic 'magic trick?' 'Now you see it, now you don't?' Or that mean-spirited joke we could do as kids, when we'd hold something good, like a piece of candy, or some money, in our open hand and tell another child, 'You want it?' And about the time that they reached out to take it, we'd quickly close up our hand and snatch it back, saying with wicked glee, 'Can't have it!' Was God being some sort of 'big bully' with a sarcastic wit about Him?

Noooo, I don't think so. Then WHY? Well, the answer is... I DON'T KNOW! (Gee, disappointed?) The Scriptures don't really make any further comment. One popular explanation is that due to the revered status of Moses, as one who had seen God 'face-to-face,' God did not want him to be connected with any particular land, region, or place. Which could also explain why that ***"No one knows his burial place to this day."*** That for such a great leader as Moses, it would not do him justice to be associated with one single spot. In terms of his importance to God's 'Chosen people,' he was MUCH BIGGER than any one location...

This is a perspective that would also do us well as today's followers of God. We too can fall into that trap of thinking of "Church" as a building that we go too... a 'box' in which God resides, that we can go visit for a while on Sunday and then go back to our everyday lives, leaving Him until we come back next week. We must, however, to borrow from a familiar expression, **'THINK OUTSIDE THE BOX.'** That the God we serve cannot be contained in one little space for a short while on a particular day of the week. We serve a BIG, BIG GOD. A 'Big God' who wants to be a part of our every-day, walking-around life.

'Church' is much more than a place to go, or an event to participate in. You and I ARE the church. Wherever we go. Whoever we see. To that young lady at the bank teller window. To that woman at the checkout in the grocery. From civic group to bridge group, from nursing home to family home. **We are the church!** And just like everyone knew just where Moses'

allegiances lie... don't you know that Pharaoh was like, 'Oh NO, here comes that God-follower MOSES again!'... so too should you and I be readily associated with the God WE follow. Sure, you can DEFINITELY tell them just which 'holy huddle' you belong to... **First Presbyterian, LOUD AND PROUD...** but more importantly, you and I are to bear a ready witness to the God who is bigger than any sanctuary or denomination. In Paul's words, ***"ALWAYS be prepared to give the reason for the hope that is in you."*** Like Moses was.

Another reason that Moses was not worried about where he went from that scenic vista was that he knew he was leaving a strong **legacy of leadership** behind. ***"Joshua son of Nun was full of the spirit of wisdom, because Moses had laid his hands on him; and the Israelites obeyed him, doing as the Lord had commanded Moses."*** (Deuteronomy 34:9)

(You know who Joshua is, right? The answer to that Bible trivia question: What Bible character had no parents? 'Joshua... son of 'none' (Nun)' ☺) ANYWAY, Moses made sure to 'lay his hands' on Joshua, so that he might gain the same spirit of wisdom that God had laid on Moses. Joshua was 'commissioned' by his 'elder statesman' to carry on the mission given to him. Much as we 'commission' Elders in our church to carry on the Great Commission given to the Church by our Lord Jesus Christ.

As you and I ponder, more and more each day, what kind of **legacy** that WE are going to leave behind, we should be mindful of just how we are passing along a 'spirit of wisdom' to the generations to follow. Whether it's to our children, grandchildren, great-grandchildren... students in school... friends, family, or perfect strangers... we must take seriously Christ's command to ***"go and make disciples."*** To 'ALWAYS be prepared to give the reason for our hope'...

NOW, some of you may be thinking, 'Well, that's fine, pastor, but all that 'disciple-making' and 'reason-giving' is for YOUNGER folks! I'm just too 'O-L-D' for all of that! I'm just not in the shape I used to be...' Sooo, what does it say about our friend Moses? ***"Moses was one hundred twenty years old when he died; his sight was unimpaired and his vigor had not abated."*** (Deuteronomy 34:7)

Now as I look around, I'm thinking that nobody here is getting TOO close to that '120' milestone. (You may FEEL like it!) Now I know that some of us might struggle a bit with that

‘impaired sight’ thing... ME included! BUT, that an ‘unabated vigor’ can MORE than compensate for such obstacles. Any **physical** weaknesses that we might have can be MORE than compensated for by **spiritual** strength.

Week before last I had the pleasure of ‘worshipping’ at a nursing home in Welsh by the name of ‘Golden Age. It was a WONDERFUL experience. (In fact, I think that they should spell ‘Golden’ –‘GOD-LAND.’ For if there was little doubt to me that God’s presence ‘in the land’ was very real in that place!) In the middle of our ‘*anointed*’ singing of both very familiar and NOT-so-familiar hymns, one of the residents spoke up, saying that her friend, ‘Miss Mary,’ had a song to sing. (solo) Now, ‘Miss Mary’ was an older black woman with failing eyesight and confined to a wheelchair. But let me tell you, she sure didn’t let her *outward* circumstances affect her *inward* spirit. In the words of St. Francis, God most certainly used her as an ‘instrument of His peace.’ It wasn’t simply how she sang *musically*... but rather, the quality of her singing *spiritually*. Her physical sight might have been ‘impaired’... but his spiritual sight... her ‘**vigor**’... had definitely NOT ‘abated.’ To paraphrase a saying from my H.S. days... a ‘few’ years ago... ‘it’s not the *age* of the **dog** in the **fight**, it’s the *age* of the **fight** in the **dog**.’ Any **physical** weaknesses that we might have can be MORE than compensated for by *spiritual* strength.

In closing, I would go back to that issue of why Moses was not permitted to enter into the “Promised Land.” Perhaps it was because it didn’t really MATTER. That besides the fact that he had, in so many ways, ALREADY experienced God’s **presence** and **peace** in this time in the wilderness, he knew that his TRUE **refuge** of **safety** and **security** was NOT in any **earthly place**, but in that **heavenly home** where he would, at last, truly see God face-to-face. Moses loved the Lord his God with all his heart, soul, mind and strength. Moses loved his neighbor as himself. And for that love, Moses was confident of a future as expressed by a later saint of the faith, Paul: ***“if this earthly tent is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, but eternal in the heavens.”*** (2 Cor. 5:1)

With regards to that ‘***building from God, eternal in the heavens,***’ I leave you with this final quote. It is also from a strong leader, both in the church and his community. One who could also be embroiled in some controversy. A man who loved both his God, and his fellow man. He writes:

"I just want to do God's will. And He's allowed me to go up to the mountain. And I've looked over. And I've seen the Promised Land. I may not get there with you. But I want you to know tonight, that we, as a people, will get to the Promised Land. So I'm happy, tonight. I'm not worried about anything. I'm not fearing any man. Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord."

If you haven't guessed, those words were written by another 'reformer' named Martin Luther... KING, that is. That speech was given on April 3, 1968... the day before he was assassinated. Did he have some 'premonition' of his death? Who knows? Only God. But may we share with Dr. King that same confidence. To **seek to do God's will**. To be **grateful** for **mountain top experiences**... even though we don't know what valleys may be in store. To live without fear. To live with joy. Because we WILL 'get to the Promised Land'... AND our eyes WILL see the glory of the coming of the Lord. That was Dr. King's vision... and Moses' vision. And may it also be OURS. And may all God's Chosen Ones say, 'AMEN!'