

Deuteronomy 34:1-12

New Revised Standard Version

Then Moses went up from the plains of Moab to Mount Nebo, to the top of Pisgah, which is opposite Jericho, and the Lord showed him the whole land: Gilead as far as Dan, all Naphtali, the land of Ephraim and Manasseh, all the land of Judah as far as the Western Sea, the Negeb, and the Plain—that is, the valley of Jericho, the city of palm trees—as far as Zoar. The Lord said to him, “This is the land of which I swore to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, saying, ‘I will give it to your descendants’; I have let you see it with your eyes, but you shall not cross over there.” Then Moses, the servant of the Lord, died there in the land of Moab, at the Lord’s command. He was buried in a valley in the land of Moab, opposite Beth-peor, but no one knows his burial place to this day. Moses was one hundred twenty years old when he died; his sight was unimpaired and his vigor had not abated. The Israelites wept for Moses in the plains of Moab thirty days; then the period of mourning for Moses was ended.

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.

Never since has there arisen a prophet in Israel like Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face. He was unequalled for all the signs and wonders that the Lord sent him to perform in the land of Egypt, against Pharaoh and all his servants and his entire land, and for all the mighty deeds and all the terrifying displays of power that Moses performed in the sight of all Israel.

We are so blessed at Greenland Hills to have so many children. I remember after I became the pastor here in 2013, I was in a meeting with the Bishop of the North Texas Conference and he said that the average age of the congregation at Greenland Hills was younger than any other church in the North Texas Conference. Having children in your church is hard because children move, children run, and children talk loudly. You know that a church is alive if there are children, and Greenland Hills is alive.

We aren’t able to be together like we are used to. We don’t get to hear the children running down the halls or get to see them eating donuts. And I miss it! There is so much that we have missed because of COVID-19. It has been so easy to be disappointed during this time. Life isn’t what we are used to.

We hear a story from Scripture today about someone who is disappointed. It really is one of the most interesting plot twists in all of Scripture. READ BIBLE. More than any other Israelite in the desert, Moses has earned the right to cross that river and enter the promised land. From the fiery bush that first called him, through the Red Sea, and all the complaining he heard from everyone as they walked and walked. They finally get close to the promised land and Moses gets to look but he doesn’t get to go.

I can’t even imagine how disappointed Moses would have been. The word “disappointment” means what it sounds like, to miss an appointment. To have a scheduled expectation broken, a previously calendared promise erased. The greater the promise, the more devastating its disappearance. We know that life isn’t fair and it is okay to be mad and sad and feel whatever we feel. Our emotions are good, they are God-given and they are life giving. We can’t choose to be happy. Imagine if we told Moses, be happy even though you didn’t make it to the place that you spent forty years trying to get to! If you miss your friends or you haven’t been able to hug your family, it’s okay to be sad.

We have learned during this pandemic that we are not limitless, that everything is not possible. We have this concept of things being fair. Fair would mean that life rewarded the good and punished the bad, or at least pretended to. Life isn’t fair because so often the bad aren’t punished and the good aren’t rewarded. Author Kate Bowler says, “Life is so beautiful. Life is so

---

<sup>1</sup> A Preacher’s Guide to Lectionary Sermon Series. P. 70

hard.” Both can be true. However, joy persists and we are invited to soak it in. I was listening to the Evolving Faith podcast and Raedorah Steward said, “There have been glimmers of joy that fuel my hope. There have been glimmers of resilience that fuel my hope.”<sup>2</sup> If there is any day to remember and celebrate that truth, it is today when we celebrate the children of this church.

One of the things that I love the most about Greenland Hills is that there is every age range here, from babies to Margie Holman at 97. I love newborn babies. Holding their perfect human bodies feels so holy, it is a feeling of God’s presence. St. Augustine called that feeling the sweetness. Thomas Aquinas called it the prophetic light. Those feelings will go, that sense of God’s presence will go and there is no formula for how to get it back. Yet, somehow we are marked by the presence of God.

This Bible passage that we read was what Martin Luther King Jr. preached on the night before he was assassinated. He was speaking in support of striking sanitation workers and he talked about something that happened nearly a decade earlier when a woman with mental illness stabbed him in the chest with a letter opener and he almost died. He talked about his own mortality as he put himself into the story of Moses. Listen to Martin Luther King Jr.’s words, “Well, I don’t know what will happen now; we’ve got some difficult days ahead. But it really doesn’t matter to me now, because I’ve been to the mountaintop. And I don’t mind. Like anybody, I would like to live a long life—longevity has its place. But I’m not concerned about that now. 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. And 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.”<sup>3</sup>

Martin Luther King Jr. is able to name the reality of the world in which we live and offer a vision of the world as it could and should be. But, how do we get to the mountaintop where we can say “mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord?” It starts with imagination so that we can see meaning in our disappointment. When we can appreciate the good even in the midst of loss. It is a reminder for us that the promised land is out there and God will see us to it. In that Evolving Faith podcast I was listening to the other day, another speaker named Derrick Dawson said, “Sometimes I feel like I don’t have to be hopeful, I just have to be diligent and faithful and get up the next day and do it again.”<sup>4</sup>

It is so easy for us to think of Pharaoh when we think of Moses. But, maybe we can instead think of Moses sitting with God watching the horizon of his life’s work, feeling not resentment, not disappointment, but gratitude. We need some imagination and some perspective to remind ourselves that a grander story is being told. We can rejoice and give thanks for our place in that story, in spite of disappointments we face along the way.

Last Sunday we gave our last third graders Bibles and our amazing Children’s Minister, Kristin Mallory, said there are some good stories in this Bible and there are some bad stories. But, this whole book is story after story of God loving us. The Bible majors in hope because the Bible is about God who never leaves the people.

Joshua is chosen as the new leader for the people and they still complain. Joshua points the people to God and they sometimes listen. Martin Luther King Jr. pointed people to look at the white supremacy and the racism that was all around them, and they sometimes listened but

---

<sup>2</sup> Evolving Faith Podcast episode 17.

<sup>3</sup> Martin Luther King Jr. <https://kinginstitute.stanford.edu/encyclopedia/ive-been-mountaintop> April 3, 1968

<sup>4</sup> Evolving Faith Podcast episode 17.

there were people who didn't want to hear the truth. I think of leaders who have tried to point us to look at the reality of climate change so that we can leave this earth for our children better than it is now. But, we don't want to listen.

Disappointments will face us. It's okay to be sad about a missed trip or visit or other expected thing. We don't always get what we want or expect. But we are always loved. Last Sunday after Kristin Mallory and I gave Eloise Andrade her third grade Bible we filmed her and her brother and sister for our worship today. We asked them to say, "You're a blessing," but they said, "I'm a blessing." Kristin said it was perfect because it is true. We are a blessing and we are called to make a difference in this world. We are a blessing and we are called to share hope and love and gratitude with this world. We are called to love God and love our neighbor. We are called to do justice, to love kindness and to walk humbly with God. (Micah 6:8). I am a blessing and you are too. Thanks be to God, Amen.