

Our second reading comes from the book of deuteronomy

Deuteronomy 34:1-12

34:1 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,

34:2 all Naphtali, the land of Ephraim and Manasseh, all the land of Judah as far as the Western Sea,

34:3 the Negeb, and the Plain -- that is, the valley of Jericho, the city of palm trees -- as far as Zoar.

34:4 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."

34:5 Then Moses, the servant of the LORD, died there in the land of Moab, at the Lord's command.

34:6 He was buried in a valley in the land of Moab, opposite Beth-peor, but no one knows his burial place to this day.

34:7 Moses was one hundred twenty years old when he died; his sight was unimpaired and his vigor had not abated.

34:8 The Israelites wept for Moses in the plains of Moab thirty days; then the period of mourning for Moses was ended.

34:9 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.

34:10 Never since has there arisen a prophet in Israel like Moses, whom the LORD knew face to face.

34:11 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,

34:12 and for all the mighty deeds and all the terrifying displays of power that Moses performed in the sight of all Israel.

The word of the lord

Thanks be to God

Let us pray... May the words of my mouth, and the meditations of all of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, oh God our rock and redeemer. Amen

A show that has wormed its way into my life has become the Great British Baking Show, also known as the Great british bake off, or simple Bake Off... there are many, although not all, seasons available to stream on Netflix,

The show has inspired me to try some bread baking, and while it has been a while, I am sure that a loaf will make its way for some of you to try.

Amateur bakers from across the UK compete in three challenges each week, a signature, a technical, and a showstopper, with one baker being named star-baker, and one baker being sent home, the final week there are three finalists, one of whom is crowned the winner.

The show is not without its imperfections; the bakes produced by the bakers are not without imperfections as well...

Each week The technical challenge forces bakers to make the same recipe and they have no idea what it is before they remove a piece of gingham

cloth covering both a simple recipe and the same ingredients for all the bakers.

Sometimes the technical challenge is something that is familiar, sometimes it is something that none of the bakers have heard of, yet alone seen, let alone baked before.

The first technical of the most recent season, was something that I guarantee all of the bakers had at least seen before, because the technical challenge was to make the chocolate cake that features in the opening credits, and features under the title in every episode.

It is a two layer chocolate cake, covered in chocolate ganache, covered in a single layer of fresh raspberries.

Well almost covered, there is one raspberry missing from the cake;

So close to complete, yet clearly with something missing...

I've been thinking a lot about unfinished jobs

The text we read in Deuteronomy leaves us with Moses, on the doorstep of the promised land, yet he will not set foot there.

Moses is so close, and yet it feels as if his work is unfinished, his task incomplete, his cake missing a final raspberry. He is not allowed to cross the river.

This scene that is described here is so powerful.

Moses has done a ton.

The first five books of the bible are often called the pentateuch, and besides God, Moses is the main character in 4 of the 5, Exodus, leuiticus, NUmbers, and now Deuteronomy,

Deuteronomy functions in many ways as Moses' last will and testament, containing sermon-like sections, songs, legal codes, specific instructions for caring of orphans, widows, and immigrants, the naming of Moses' successor (Joshua) and the description of Moses' death.

The final scene of Moses' life, of the pentateuch, of deuteronomy is a mountain top experience.

Moses is brought to the top of Pisgah mountain; and shown far beyond what a person would be capable of seeing with the naked eye.

Biblical Scholar Sara M. Koenig (no relation) notes that "This vision is not only dependent on Moses, however, for both times that the verb is used, it is causative, with God as the subject. God shows Moses; God causes Moses to see. Though we may need to open up our own eyes and look for what God is doing and where God is, we also may need to ask God to show us — to reveal to us — where God is at work."

Moses may be the main character, but we see God working in everything that is done.

We may do good, advocate for justice, care for one another, feed our neighborhood friends, visit one another in the hospital, and it is dependant not on us alone, God is working in those actions as well.

In this final account we hear that Moses is buried, using a passive voice, and due both to the use of a passive voice and the notice that no-one knows where Moseses body is buried leads us to see that God in one more earthly act of intimacy somehow is the one who buried Moses; a prophet of singular character and immense importance

"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.”

And yet, there is still a missing raspberry, the job of fully bringing the people out of Egypt and into the promised land.

Perhaps that is good enough.

Zina Jacque who is the Assistant to the Pastor for Small Groups at the Historic Alfred Street Baptist Church in Alexandria, Virginia wrote one of the articles I read while preparing and researching for this passage, she certainly impacted my thinking on it, as she wrote;

“Might it be that Moses learns and teaches us that none of us is sufficient to complete the tasks that build the Kingdom? Might we each need a Joshua who will take our excellence (or whatever we bring) and move it to the next level?”

If even Moses has a Joshua, it may not be comfortable to let go, to leave unfinished, to trust that

“How would the work of the church, indeed, the world’s work, shift on its axis if human beings strove not to succeed in their own name, for their own fame, or at all costs? What would happen if our ultimate goal as clergy and church leaders was something other than completing every task? What if our highest goal was to equip the next person to advance the cause, even though, like Moses, we are still full of the vim and vigor of our best days? What if we each spent more time looking for and encouraging our Joshuas and less time making sure we are the ones whose names are listed as the final hero of the story? What would be different about your life, my life, and our ministries if we were less focused on leading institutions to victory and more focused on ensuring sufficient bench strength within the institution?”

I love these questions, and perhaps they will serve to help reframe our focus during this transitional moment.

And I will be honest, I don't exactly know what will happen, but if we are honest and look at church history, it looks a lot like what the church has been.

Every generation trains the next, we ordain elders and deacons to carry on the work of the church.

We are ordaining a new elder today.

Last week, a very thoughtful member of the congregation came up to me and asked, something along the lines of

"Would it be correct to say you see your role as that of a teacher?"

To which I said yes.

In the PCUSA we sometimes refer to our pastors as teaching elders.

As I have had some time to reflect on the comment, and the question, I see my role as living into what Paul wrote in the letter to the church in Ephesus:

"He (Jesus Christ) himself granted that some are apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers **12** to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, **13** until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity,[e] to the measure of the full stature of Christ."

We build through teaching, encouraging, training, mentoring, and forming new disciples to ensure that our bench is deep, that we build the body of Christ.

I can look out and see many faces who have been equipped, and are ready to be equipped and encouraged for the work of ministry.

From the beginning of the church, we have all been about training, mentoring, and ensuring that we continue to work for God's Kin-dom, because we believe that God is still active, God who showed Moses, who buried Moses, who was the primary active force, is the primary active force, and for us today most importantly God will be the one who continues to bend the moral arc of universe towards justice, towards love, towards the reign of love that Jesus preached, one of liberation, that feeds the hungry, clothes the naked, and visits the prisoner.

That takes special care of vulnerable peoples; orphans, widows, immigrants, and anyone who society would try to exploit.

Because I truly believe that God is not done with the world, God is not done with us, and we can come alongside God, knowing our work will never quite be done until we one day know in the fullness of the kin-dom.

Another saint, who worked for the kingdom, for the beloved community was the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

In his final speech, less than 24 hours before he would be assassinated clearly had this passage from deuteronomy referenced behind his words.

"Well, I don't know what will happen now. We've got some difficult days ahead. But it doesn't matter with 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 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."

We will see the promised land and if I didn't truly trust that, I would not be here, we will see a land of justice, of peace, of love, as a people, we will, even if as individuals we may not complete the task on our own, we may only see it from a distance, yet we have faith that God is continuing to work for a better world through the people of God.

So let us build up, equip, and mentor one another

Amen