

Deuteronomy 34:1-7

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.

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Here endeth the great story of Moses. All that is left now is the memory of God's mighty acts and Moses' role in all of that; so it is a considerable memory. The things Moses took part in were foundational. They were part of the formative history of Israel and may be referenced throughout the Old Testament. The Exodus is the defining event of Judaism, even greater-- in my opinion-- than God calling Abram to get everything started. Certainly the Exodus was more definitive of a great religion than God merely calling this antique Chaldean, one of the sons of Terah.

And now we must begin the business of translating this ancient event into the modern era and idiom; but not only that, we must shrink it from the great defining events of the time of Moses and make it fit it to the great defining events of our lives; of the life of this church. Ah, but how can we do that? Not even de Mille with his cast of thousands and his cinematographic tricks could do it justice on the big screen, how can one man with admittedly limited resources. How can one congregation reduce the big show to the sanctuary of Community of Faith Presbyterian Church with its boast of 120 members and an average age very close to, if not exceeding seventy.

Let's try this gambit. I wonder if we invited a great writer and asked her to choose one of you to write the story of your life, your biography, in very much the same way that the story of Israel was recorded in the Bible. I don't believe that it would take much for your life or mine to sound very much like a dynamic or adventuresome history like that of Israel. OK, maybe you've never been out of the county, much less out of the state. You say you've never owned a sword or a spear, to say nothing of a fire arm. You say your life has been boring and that nobody would be interested in your life.

I might reply to you: have you ever been lonely, afraid, happy, sad, angry, and any of a hundred other feelings? Have you ever cheated? Not even just a little? Have you ever been mad enough to want to strike somebody? Have you ever been scared? Have you ever known joy? Grace? If you can say yes to some, to any or all of this, or all of this and

a whole lot more, then your story is anything but boring because life is not so much about where we've been, but what we have done. Our journey together in Jesus Christ is less about where we have gone geographically, and more about us moving through time.

What makes a church great then is not so much how many we have or how much we give, but how we relate, and the extent we see our lives together as a journey through time. You could even think of us as a mini-Israel for just as Israel has a story filled with peace and turmoil and just like you and I have stories replete with ups and downs, when we gather in this room, at this particular time; although we are not limited to this particular time, we become the image of what we are, a group of people who are chosen and who chose to be part of each other's lives, part of each others' journeys.

In a few minutes, not long-- I promise-- when our service has ended, when our physical presence in community disintegrates from this place, those of you who choose to remain will participate in the tenth annual meeting of this community of faith. Many of us have been here from the beginning and before. Some from way before. Some who were so grounded in the previous churches in Covington and Ludlow that it was nearly impossible to embrace a new church. I can remember the optimism that I had at the time. I remember saying things like, "this will be a new church, it will be a church where nobody can say, "that's the way we've always done it!" But I was terribly wrong, for in the beginning we struggled. And I was very wrong about the optimism of starting all things new. I had forgotten that we do not travel, as individuals, as families, or even as churches without baggage. Soon I realized that, far from nobody being able to say, "that's the way we've always done it," two groups of people were saying it, and the differences were palpable and painful.

Some could not bear up under the strain and left. Others never connected, but there were some joyful events as well as some policies that merged well. Both churches brought a passion for mission. Both churches brought a core group of seasoned church workers who were, and remain willing to give of their time, talents and treasures.

Lately we have limped along, but our hearts are strong. We have our moments of doubt when we wonder if for our community there will be a "next year"-- but we have wondered about that for awhile and, well-- here we are, and I know, as we move to begin our Tenth Annual Meeting we are haunted by the doubts that nag us. We are haunted by the devil who whispers, "You made it through 2009, but can you do it again?"

And we say no, we cannot because it is no longer 2009. We know what happened in 2009 and we do not know what will happen over the remainder of 2010. This we do know. We are here today and most likely will be here next week and during the weeks to follow we will find the opportunities to serve as the community of faith we have been called out to be, and to become; and yes Lord, "we believe, help our unbelief!"

When "Moses was one hundred twenty years old, and while "his sight was unimpaired and his vigor had not abated," God had him climb a mountain in what is now western Jordan to give him a look at the land of Canaan, the land he and the Hebrew people

believed that God had promised them.

When I visited Israel in 1984, I realized how much of the land you could see from certain mountain tops, and while I never got “to Mount Nebo, to the top of Pisgah, which is opposite Jericho,” I found that the land from the base of the mountains stretched out before me like a map at my feet. I could see streams and farmlands, towns and cities, hills and valleys and even ocean. I could see the wasteland of the Negeb and the beauty of the recovered farmlands in Galilee. It was then I realized that there is much about the future that we can predict, as I am sure Moses must have known. But despite the sureness of his vision all of us are limited and Moses could not see everything. We can see some things, but there is much we cannot see, much about the future remains hidden to us.

And so we step carefully but bravely together into the future. I know I do this with you because my future without you is not pleasant for me to speculate, even though it is inevitable for all of us. But we are not there yet and today we have been called to travel on together into well known territory which still contains secrets and surprises: some good, others not so good. But one thing I do know is that we are together, we are here for each other, if we need each other and even if we don't.

I believe that as we journey through time together, the sun shines a little brighter, and the darkness is not so dark. The rains nurture us and the storms strengthen us. It is why in spite of a variety of numbers that are lower than we would like them to be, we retain optimism for God had carried us this far and carries us still and I do not believe that there are any plans afoot to do otherwise.

The Christian faith, all faith; Christian community, all community is risky business but if we can nurture the belief that God has called us together, and that God is with us in the journey, we can set forth on an optimistic foot like Jesus said, “wise as serpents, and innocent as doves.”