

**Deuteronomy 34:1-12**

*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 buried him 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.*

Unfinished Business

We are a few days away from Halloween... in case you haven't noticed. Isn't it interesting how much bigger a deal Halloween is these days? I understand why kids love it — dressing up and going to strange houses to get some candy is pretty fun — but I really don't get how much adults are into it! If you are one, I'm not judging, I just don't get it. I wonder if we have a need to connect more with death. We flirted with death, and many did die from the pandemic, and people are still dying from Covid. Death is a thing that we can't control. As it edges closer through pandemics and climate change, maybe we like to play with it a little in a way that we *can* control, with scary skulls and fake blood. That's just me musing ... I really have no idea, but I suspect there is a connection between needing to talk about death and the rise of Halloween — or maybe stores just need a way to sell more stuff! (I'm officially old and grumpy — kids these days! Adults these days!)

Halloween is the day before All Saints Day. It's "All Hallow's Eve" said quickly. In the Christian calendar we take a day to remember those who have gone before us.

This morning we look at the death of Moses.

The long journey through the wilderness has come to an end.

- We touched on Moses' call with the Burning Bush.
- We touched on the escape—the Exodus— from Egypt after plagues and the crossing of the Red Sea.
- We touched on the trials in the desert — a harsh place lacking in water and food.

It seemed like it lasted forever — but in a blink of an eye, the 40 years in the desert is over. It is also over for Moses. At the end of the book of Deuteronomy it tells of the death of Moses.

Before the people and the story move on, they pay tribute to Moses. The passage talks about how wonderful Moses was. Never since had there arisen a prophet in Israel like Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face. He was **unequaled**, it says. No one comes close to Moses, and no one will until Jesus is born. When it comes to being faithful and fulfilling his life as being one who is chosen — we talked about chosen last week — no one touches Moses. No one is deserving of greater reward after a job well done.

I was chatting with someone this week who had 40-something years with his company. You don't hear of that anymore. The company has changed hands a few times over the years, but he has worked with them since he was a teenager, and still hasn't retired yet. I said to him "I hope you get a really nice pen when you retire!" He laughed.

People used to work their whole life for a company and be rewarded with some nice gift at the end—along with a pension. I think we did a nice job of honouring Cathy when she retired; but this man said he'd probably get a piece of paper saying "Happy Retirement" or something. Times have changed. Companies don't keep workers long-term like they used to, and I don't think they reward longevity so much either.

*Moses has fought the good fight, he has kept the faith, **he has finished the race.***  
Almost... close, so close.

In fact, Moses dies just meters from the finish line. **God takes him up to a mountaintop so Moses can see the Promised Land. He can see it, he can smell it, he can almost taste it — but he is denied crossing over** into the Promised Land. He worked his whole life for that goal and doesn't make it. The closest he gets is seeing it from the mountaintop. He never makes it out of the wilderness.

There are a couple of different and sometimes *conflicting reasons* given for why he is not allowed to cross over the Jordan river with the people of God. In one verse it talks about his own sin, in another it's because of the sin of the whole generation who first left Egypt, and in other verses like we read today, no reason at all is given. Why? Why, if he was so good, why if he worked so darned hard for this one goal — is he denied it?

There is a sense of disappointment in this text and a feeling that it's **not fair**, that

something has not been fulfilled or finished. Sure, he was old. You can't expect really much more life than what he got. 7 *"Moses was one hundred twenty years old when he died."* But the text says that *"his sight was unimpaired, and his vigor had not abated."* Wouldn't you like that now, let alone at 120! Even though he **lives to 120, there is a feeling that his life has been cut short.** Clearly, he was not worn out in body. If he had so much vim and vigour, why not let the guy cross the river??

The death of Moses speaks to the unfairness that death almost always brings. No matter how long you live, if you live reasonably well, it will always feel too short.

When I was living in Claresholm, Alberta, I met a man by the name of Gentry Ohler. Gentry was quite a guy. For one thing he lived to just one month shy of being 106. I think I met him when he was 103. And right up to the end he was sharp as a tack. He was a neat guy. At the age of 98 he bought a new Ford truck! Can you imagine that? I know some people who won't buy green bananas, 'because you never know. But Gentry bought a brand-new, fully loaded Ford F150. The local funeral director couldn't resist asking him if he was going to get an extended warranty on that truck! Gentry told him he wasn't going to press his luck.

Florence Lindsay was similar. At the age of 100 she was still driving the "old ladies" to church. The old ladies she was referring to were mostly 20 years younger than her. (Actually, she had a hard time renewing her license because the computer only allowed 2 digits for her age, so she wrote 01... and you clearly aren't old enough to drive if you are only 1!)

Those are two people I remember who not only lived a very long life, but they had health and their wits about them right to the end. Audrey Butterill also comes to mind. Their losses were keenly felt.

My point is that even when you live what we consider a very long life, it can feel too short. I'd be willing to bet that each one of you can think of someone, perhaps several people, whose lives felt too short. Let's just take a moment and lift up those names and those faces... *God, we give you thanks for these people. We loved them and still miss them. Be near as we continue to remember and grieve their losses.*

The fact is that with death there usually comes a sense of unfinished business – that there is more to do, more life to live. One of the things I do when I meet with people who are dying is invite them to lay down the regrets and the unfinished business.

Laying down unfinished business is hard to do. It's hard not being able to do what we used to do, but also hard to let go of something that matters to us. I'll always remember visiting with Helen Marshall who was a dear woman and one of the saints of this church. She was dying — she was less than a day from when she passed from this life, through death and into eternal life — and I remember she was very upset that she

didn't have the energy to write thank-you cards for all the cards of care and the flowers that had been sent to her. She was hours from her own death, and she just wanted to thank people for their care and concern. It was both funny/curious to me but also so very human.

**Imbedded in unfinished business is the grief that you won't be there to see something you care about through.** Some people accomplish concrete things in their lives and can say "I achieved this, this and this." But when it comes to some of the larger things, like the larger justice issues of feeding hungry people or working to end homelessness or towards peace or helping people to know that Jesus loves them — you're not likely to finish it. There's still more to do.

I was talking to someone the other day who doesn't attend this church but who knows how much we care and do at this church to help people who are unhoused and living on the edge. She was telling me that she was reading about how much worse it will be in the coming years because the solutions can't come fast enough. It's a depressing thought.

It's depressing if we see ourselves as the center of the universe. But when we place ourselves within **God's plan**, we understand that God has a plan that is bigger than us. It's kind of awesome really to think that we play a small but important part in what God has planned.

God knew when he called Moses from a burning bush that **his plan was bigger than Moses' life**. When we imagine and step into God's plans, we realize that we are part of something so much bigger! When we view it that way, it's not depressing — it's hopeful.

I was thinking of **Rev. Bob and Delia McGregor**. They started in this church a ministry called the "Shepherd's Welcome Center". It was a ministry where seniors could do activities together. A couple of years ago they changed the name to the "Brockville 50+". I think Bob and Delia would be absolutely floored that what they began is not only still going but is huge and growing and doing so much good! I also bet 99% of people connected with the Brockville 50+ don't realize that it was started by a minister and his wife from this church *because God called them to do it*. But God knows, and God knew.

Keep doing whatever God has called you to do until God calls you to stop. When it feels frustrating that hunger, poverty, recovery, sharing God's love are too big for you, remember God who called you. Remember that God holds the blueprint and will not abandon the plan even when it's time to call you home. The work God calls us to is far more like a relay than a 100-meter dash. Moses didn't make it to the Promised land. His race was over, but the race towards freedom and new life was still a work in progress — a work in God's hands.

Martin Luther King Jr. understood this. Towards the end of his life, he had continual threats on his life. At one point he was stabbed and was told that if he'd sneezed, he would have died, because the knife was so close to his aortic artery. He was surrounded by threats, so I'm guessing he couldn't help but think about his life and his potential death. He was such a wonderful preacher and speaker. I hope you see where he takes us back to Moses and the end of his life.

This is part of the speech that he delivered on April 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1968, in Memphis, Tennessee ... the night before he was assassinated.

*Now, it doesn't matter, now. It really doesn't matter what happens now. I left Atlanta this morning, and as we got started on the plane, ... The pilot said over the public address system, "We are sorry for the delay, but we have Dr. Martin Luther King on the plane. And to be sure that all of the bags were checked, and to be sure that nothing would be wrong on the plane, we had to check out everything carefully. And we've had the plane protected and guarded all night."*

*And then I got into Memphis. And some began to say the threats or talk about the threats that were out. What would happen to me from some of our sick white brothers? Well, I don't know what will happen now. We've got some difficult days ahead. But it really 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 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!!*

May we too spend time with God, may we go to the mountaintop with God. God would love nothing more than to walk with you and remind you that you matter and that you are part of God's great plan. May we go to the mountaintop with God and see the plans that God has that go far beyond our own lives. Thanks be to God. Amen.

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