PENTECOST 22

Proper 25 - Year A

This Bible study was written by ***the Rev. Michael Thompson*** *of* ***Bexley Seabury Seminary****.*

Deuteronomy 34:1-12

34 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, [2] all Naphtali, the land of
Ephraim and Manasseh, all the land of Judah as far as
the Western Sea, [3] the Negeb, and the Plain—that is,
the valley of Jericho, the city of palm trees—as far as
Zoar. [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." [5] Then Moses, the servant of the Lord, died
there in the land of Moab, at the Lord's
command. [6] He buried him in a valley in the land of
Moab, opposite Beth-peor, but no one knows his
burial place to this day. [7] Moses was one hundred
twenty years old when he died; his sight was
unimpaired, and his vigor had not abated. [8] The
Israelites wept for Moses in the plains of Moab thirty
days; then the period of mourning for Moses was
ended.

[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.

[10] Never since has there arisen a prophet in Israel like
Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face. [11] He was
unequaled 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, [12] and for all the mighty deeds and all the
terrifying displays of power that Moses performed in
the sight of all Israel.

Commentary from Michael Anderson

Moses' story ends with God showing him the Promised Lan,d even though Moses would "not cross over there." The statement is traditionally considered a reminder of the punishment at the Waters of Meribah (cf. Numbers 20:1-13).

Even with this reminder of punishment, there is no indication that Moses is dying unfulfilled or with any regrets. Quite the opposite. Despite being 120 years old, God has preserved Moses' body and mind – so much so that he can climb a mountain. Moses is only permitted to die at God's express command, and it is God who seemingly buries Moses personally (since no one else knows where Moses is buried). There is great mourning over Moses, a prophet unlike any other. This passage gives us a completed story of a fulfilled Moses.

Of course, there is profound grief over Moses' death, but even as there is much more to come in the story of the People of Israel, Moses' story is complete and fulfilled. This is a powerful culminating moment. Moses is far from the man who knew nothing of his people or their God, the man whom this as-of-yet-unknown-to-him God sent to confront the most powerful empire in the world. Moses is far from the still fledgling leader facing the seemingly impossible task of leading God's people out of oppression, through desert and desolation, and into promise. There have been many stumbles on the way, but Moses is a very different, more spiritually mature, and whole man than he was. Moses' death narrative marks for us the unbelievable spiritual growth that comes from walking with God.

Discussion Question

How has your walk with God changed you? How has your spiritual journey moved you from oppression through desolation and into promise?

Psalm 90:1-6, 13-17

1 Lord, you have been our refuge *
from one generation to another.
2 Before the mountains were brought forth,
or the land and the earth were born, *
from age to age you are God.
3 You turn us back to the dust and say, *
"Go back, O child of earth."
4 For a thousand years in your sight are like
yesterday when it is past *
and like a watch in the night.
5 You sweep us away like a dream; *
we fade away suddenly like the grass.
6 In the morning it is green and flourishes; *
in the evening it is dried up and withered.
13 Return, O Lord; how long will you tarry? *
be gracious to your servants.
14 Satisfy us by your loving-kindness in the
morning; *
so shall we rejoice and be glad all the days
of our life.
15 Make us glad by the measure of the days that
you afflicted us *
and the years in which we suffered
adversity.
16 Show your servants your works *
and your splendor to their children.
17 May the graciousness of the Lord our God be
upon us; *
prosper the work of our hands;
prosper our handiwork.

Commentary from Michael Anderson

This week presents us with two seemingly dissonant portions of Psalm 90. The first six verses speak of God's eternal nature in contrast to our mortality with the assurance that our mortality rests within the refuge of God's eternity. The concluding five verses, though, plead for God to return to being the refuge God has been in the past. As we turn to verse 13, we might wonder where the assurance in verse 1 went.

These two sets of verses speak profoundly to human experience. Even when we feel most secure about God's love for us and faithfulness and goodwill toward us, there are times when God's grace seems so far away, when we can't muster rejoicing, when we face adversity. We feel the need to remind God – or more accurately to remind ourselves – of God's past graciousness, begging for its return. In those times, strength comes both from crying out to God *and* remembering that God's nature is always love and goodness.

Discussion Question

How do you find solace when God's graciousness seems far off?

1 Thessalonians 2:1-8

2 You yourselves know, brothers and sisters, that our
coming to you was not in vain, [2] but though we had
already suffered and been shamefully mistreated at
Philippi, as you know, we had courage in our God to
declare to you the gospel of God in spite of great
opposition. [3] For our appeal does not spring from
deceit or impure motives or trickery, [4] but, just as we
have been approved by God to be entrusted with the
message of the gospel, even so we speak, not to
please mortals but to please God, who tests our
hearts. [5] As you know and as God is our witness, we
never came with words of flattery or with a pretext
for greed, [6] nor did we seek praise from mortals,
whether from you or from others, [7] though we might
have made demands as apostles of Christ. But we
were gentle among you, like a nurse tenderly caring
for her own children. [8] So deeply do we care for you
that we are determined to share with you not only the
gospel of God but also our own selves, because you
have become very dear to us.

Commentary from Michael Anderson

In our society, we know preachers in many forms. We have televangelists, megachurch pastors, small parish pastors, preachers in large cardinal parishes, street preachers, prophets, and more. There are still many others who, though they may not consider themselves preachers, proclaim what they believe to be the core principles of the Gospel. Perhaps worse yet, these people do not all speak with one voice. They offer sometimes radically opposing views of the Gospel. How do we know which people and messages are genuine?

That is part of what Paul is addressing in this passage. He wants the Thessalonians to know that he is the real deal. Perhaps the Thessalonians are suspicious and looking out for "deceit," "impure motives," and "trickery" because of past evangelists. Perhaps they have heard that the Philippians did not take too kindly to Paul, a concern Paul addresses head-on.

Paul counsels first that the Thessalonians (and we) listen to what these messengers say. If it is too good to be true, too much of what we *want* to hear, perhaps our suspicion is warranted. Surely, this is not the only test, but flattery may denote a pretext for greed. Paul contrasts himself and his companions against itinerate philosophers and Christian preachers who were paid to impart their wisdom. Paul does his work out of love and mission, not for money.

Paul also counsels that the Thessalonians (and we) listen to how these messengers deliver their message. Paul and his companions are invested in those to whom they preach, and so they deliver their message with gentleness and care as a parent for a child. So much so that they share *themselves*, not just the message.

Discussion Question

How would you preach the Gospel to someone who is very dear to you?

Matthew 22:34-46

[34] When the Pharisees heard that he had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together, [35] and one of them, an expert in the law, asked him a question to test him. [36] "Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?" [37] He said to him, " 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' [38] This is the greatest and first commandment. [39] And a second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' [40] On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets."
[41] Now while the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them this question: [42] "What do you think of the Messiah? Whose son is he?" They said to him, "The son of David." [43] He said to them, "How is it then that David by the Spirit calls him Lord, saying,

[44] 'The Lord said to my Lord,
"Sit at my right hand,
until I put your enemies under your feet" '?

[45] "If David thus calls him Lord, how can he be his son?" [46] No one was able to give him an answer, nor from that day did anyone dare to ask him any more questions.

Commentary from Michael Anderson

With Jesus having finally silenced the Sadducees, the Pharisees take up the quest to try to trip Jesus up on some doctrinal matter. They enlist a lawyer, someone who knows well the Jewish tradition that there are 613 commandments, and he asks Jesus to choose. If nothing else, which of these 613 commandments should we keep no matter what? Jesus, of course, can't just give one. He gives two – love God and love your neighbor as yourself – or maybe Jesus gives three – love God, love yourself, and love your neighbor.

But perhaps Jesus *does* respond with just one commandment. Jesus responds to these leaders learned in the Torah in words taken from the central Jewish prayer, the *Shema*. Perhaps he is trying to explain to them the meaning of these words and, in so doing, that the premise of their question is flawed. There are *not* 613 commandments. There are not two or three. There is only one: Love. That is the foundation of all the other commandments and every word that the prophets have uttered. We are to love God and cannot do so without loving ourselves and our neighbors. Nor can we do so without following the other commandments and heeding the prophets' call for justice for the oppressed and marginalized. We have but one commandment: Love.

Discussion Question

How does your own sense of what God commands us to do measure up against the commandment to love?

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