

## Deut 34 Transfiguration / Moses

I am sympathetic to anyone who reads our Old Testament Lesson and feels that Moses may have been treated a bit unfairly. Moses never wanted his Call to lead God's people out of Egypt. He didn't want or plan to wander 40 years in the wilderness listening to the people murmur, grumble, complain, and threaten him. And so he got frustrated and hit a rock – it didn't hurt anyone! And the water came out, water God knew they needed. And just like that – sorry – no promised land for you. But I'll take you up here to see it laid out the land that you are so close to – but, nope, not for you.

And Moses died there according to the Word of the Lord. God brought him up there and then spoke a word – a word of death. And Moses died. Seems a bit unfair, doesn't it?

Is his the only death that seems unfair? The stillborn. The child who dies. The person with so much life ahead of them! The innocent victim, the collateral damage, the person who by no fault of their own was in the wrong place at the wrong time. Or who just made one bad decision. The person who dies on the job one week before they retire. I don't need to spell out any more because you know this. We have our share of unfair deaths.

And if God is the One who not even a sparrow falls to the ground apart from his will (Matthew 10:29). We have to confess that God is the one who speaks this word of death. And the atheists rage that God is a moral monster and mass murderer when they read about some war in the Old Testament... But in a way they don't give God enough credit. God is God, he is omnipotent. Which means that EVERY life and therefore EVERY death is his call.

And we get philosophical (which we should), we talk about justice and how a Good God can't let evil go unpunished. And "if you want God to do something about the evil in the world, be

careful, he might start with you!” But we balk at that, because I don’t think we ACTUALLY deserve the death penalty for our sins (even though we confess it in the service). I think, somewhere in our minds we think God needs to just “lighten up a little!” “Why does everything have to carry the death penalty!” And so we, like so many before us, speak of what other currency might be payment for our sin and evil. Can we give him money? No, he doesn’t need Gold – he made it all, and no amount of points you score for the “good works” team, actually erases all the points on the evil column... and so we are left with this very real problem, that someone has to answer for the evil, and it’s got to be with something that matters. Does life and death matter?

And we think God must be able to make a better way – why can’t everyone just get 85 years and die in their sleep, quickly and surrounded by family? Is that so hard? That would be good, as far as deaths go....

But as far as deaths go... is any death good? Is it our Savior? Does it save us from the wrath to come? Does it save us from the brokenness in us and the world? If God just distributed it a bit more fairly, then would all our problems go away?

And yes you got problems. We all know it. The most put-together of us, Moses even! Problems, for there is a word of death from the Lord. Will there be, unless the Lord comes back first, a word of death for you one day just as there is for the sparrow? Yes.

And what can we do about it? Who can we appeal to? Is there a court any higher than his?

Romans 3:19 “Now we know that whatever the law says it speaks to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be stopped, and the whole world may be held accountable to God.”

No, we don’t have a leg to stand on!

And so we might cry out: “It’s a power discrepancy! It isn’t fair! He’s got all the power and we never asked to be born sinful into brokenness – with stakes so high as life and eternal death! It isn’t fair!”

And the reality is, with all the philosophical answers that really smart Christians share in really accurate ways... does that all exactly help when the bitterness of age, pain, death or that funeral come around so unfairly?

So instead, may we consider another reality – that God knows a thing or two about unfair deaths. Jesus, true God come, speaks on the mount of transfiguration with Moses and Elijah. And do you think Moses, standing there on the mountains of Israel, the promised land, do you think he was complaining about his unfair death? No, they were speaking of Jesus’ unfair death! They were speaking of his “exodus” - in the Greek - exodus, his exit, “that he was about to accomplish in Jerusalem!”

And we begin to see (and this was the point of our Hebrew’s reading) that Jesus is the greater Moses. He is not just a servant but a Son, Jesus the greater Moses, who upholds the law of Moses, the law of God, whose face shines like Moses’ did when Moses met God. Jesus shines because he is God. Jesus the Rock, as Paul says in 1 Cor. 10, that followed Moses and was struck by him for water to flow out is struck by a spear and out from his side comes water, and from his throne in the ultimate promised land the water of life will flow. And this Son, not servant, true God is perfect and therefore worthy of every promised land and every good thing. And yet he puts it aside, along with his shining, to be forsaken on the cross, to take our hell, condemnation, and punishment. And as Moses’ exodus frees God’s people from Pharaoh and slavery, Jesus, the greater Moses’ exodus frees us from slavery to sin, death, and the devil not by going down into

the Red Sea, but by going down into the tomb. Yes this Jesus who was faithful, all the way to death.

And was that fair? Did he have evil he had to be punished for? Did he hang there philosophizing and bargaining for others who deserved that death more than him? No, and so barabass and we walk free. Instead, so unfair, a Word of Death is spoken for Jesus. “It is finished, into your hands I commit my Spirit,” and with a cry he gives up his spirit.

This death, like all others, like Moses’, like the Sparrow is according to the will of God. And there in the midst of that injustice we see God’s heart for a dying world that he would go himself to die to redeem it.

That he might speak not just a word of death to the world, but also a word of life! And the Son, Jesus is risen, he exoduses from the tomb, from death! It is not stronger than him and will not win in the end nor get the last word.

And isn’t that obvious on transfiguration Sunday? Moses is there alive again – and even in the promised land of Israel! He is alive again by whose word? If the Lord’s word of death killed him, what in the universe could make him alive again? What other than the Lord’s Word of Life!

1 Samuel 2:6 – “The Lord kills and makes alive.” And notice the order of that verse, you would think it would be the Lord makes alive - here we are all alive, haven’t died yet - and THEN he kills, when we die. But that’s not the verse is it? That’s not what happened on the mount of transfiguration is it? The Lord Killed on Mount Nebo, he made Moses alive again so that he could stand and speak, not as a zombie, not in pain, but alive and whole, to speak with the Lord on the mount of transfiguration. He kills, he makes alive. Yes our Lord has a word of death, but he also has a glorious, gospel, word of life!

I guess the question then is for we who die... will he speak a word of life to us too? The beautiful answer is – he already has! And has already promised he will in the future. If sin, our evil, if that debt to justice we can't pay, is what brings death, what else then is a word of forgiveness – which has been spoken here today in your hearing for you – how is that not a word of life? For you, for you, for you, we will hear. Your name, at the font, with Christ's name upon you. His promises of mercy for all who believe, who are his, from the child to the eldest among us.

Life. That is his victorious and merciful word for you. It comes from the cross and empty tomb and brings us to something far greater than a strip of land in this broken world, it brings us to life with him in a new creation free from evil and death ever again. Yes the Lord wants so much more for us than 85-or even 120 years here – he wants far more life than that. Praise God, he spoke an unfair word of death that Jesus might die, that we might, from that Risen, Exodused Lord, hear a word of life. And this word is strong. A little girl dies and Jesus says, “Talitha Cumi” “Little girl, arise.” And she rises! He speaks to rotting Lazarus... “Lazarus come out!” And he does! And you, yes you will hear that voice and trumpet, and who is going to appeal to a higher court? Who is going to say it's unfair and you don't deserve life? No one, nothing will argue with His Word his word of life for you. God be praised. Amen.

