

The Transfiguration of Our Lord February 14, 2010

Deuteronomy 34:1-12 ðIt's Good to Be Here!ö

After all the snow, the church service cancellations, the school cancellations, the Bible study and meeting cancellations, and all the cancellations, inconveniences, and muscle building from shoveling, I want to borrow Peter's words at the Mount of Transfiguration and say, ðIt's good, Lord, to be here.ö It's good to be anywhere else than at the end of a shovel or trapped in our houses, but it's great to be HERE. (Well, someone here might still think it would be great to be trapped in their house.)

In the Old Testament reading today, I think Moses might have felt how good it was to look out at the view from Mount Nebo, ponder the success of his leadership to bring the people of Israel out of slavery from Egypt to the edge of the Promised Land, and realize that this view was similar to the one that his own ancestor Abraham saw many generations before when God promised his descendants the land.

It's good for us to be here in God's house where the view is wonderful, the love of God is in the air on this Valentine's weekend, and the spiritual rewards are eternal as we look forward to arriving in our own Promised Land of heaven which is yet to come. God looks at us and sees his special people, he knows the potential for his church as his Spirit moves in us, and he is faithful to keep his promise through Christ's life, death and resurrection. So let's join Moses on Mount Nebo and see what Moses saw.

First, Moses saw the people and the love of God for his people. After all, how could you miss 2 million people spread out like tiny ants from such a high height? When you have looked out from on top of a high mountain, you know how tiny everything becomes down in the valley. But you can still see everything. You can see for miles.

God sees from an even greater height, and God sees everything. So Christ, also, saw all of humanity from the time of Adam and Eve to the end of time. On the Mount of Transfiguration when Jesus transformed himself in the presence of Peter, James and John, and after Moses and Elijah joined him in the cloud of glory, Jesus showed his divine glory to the apostles. According to his godhead, Jesus was not limited in his ability to see all of humanity and its deep spiritual yearning for healing from its sins. And at his transfiguration, he consulted with two of his great prophets from the Old Testament whose job included calling people to faithfulness in a God who was faithful to them and kept his promises. But even when Jesus revealed his glory, he pointed to the cross as the means to glory. Jesus saw the needs of the people and in his human and divine natures was prepared to meet our deepest spiritual needs due to our sin.

Moses certainly knew that deep spiritual need of the people due to their sin. The Israelites did not trust God during the 10 plagues when Pharaoh was making it more difficult for the people in Egypt. They did not trust God to provide them with water and food along the way of the wilderness. They did not trust God to lead them safely into the Promised Land when the spies came back with a bad report of the land and its giants before whom they were but grasshoppers. They grumbled and complained and made golden calves to lead them back to Egypt. But God was faithful through all their disobedience, and God did bring them safely to the edge of the Promised Land. Moses certainly had all this on his mind when he looked out at the view of the people from Mount Nebo.

There are times in life when people don't see us at our best and when we see others both at their best and at their worst. The fact is that everyone sins daily and fails to live up perfectly to God's expectations. Sometimes we can become obsessed with the golden calves in our own lives, failing to worship God above all things. We become so involved in our own lives that we fail to love one another as God intends us to do. We become very centered on ourselves. And it is not just us. It is also the other people around us. We see people at their best and we see them at their worst. We see the fallen, human condition in each one of us. However, it does not excuse us from our failure to be all that God intended us to be before the fall into sin. However, we also have the Word of God which says that God loves us, sees our need for forgiveness, and that he has satisfied our deeper spiritual needs in Jesus Christ. When we receive the forgiveness Christ won for us, then we become useful to God. The fact is, when God looks at us, he sees our best and our worst. But having dealt with our sin, God also sees our potential.

Long before Moses, God said to Abraham, ðGo from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show youö (Gen 12:1). While the Lord told Abraham that he would make him a father of many nations, the Lord had to continue to tell Abraham this time and time again. Because of his age and because he didn't see it happen quickly, he started to doubt. Abraham was like Moses, both still living by faith when they died (Heb 11:13). When the Lord took Moses up on top of Mount Nebo that day, it was as if he was reminding Moses of the potential of all that the Lord longs to do in the lives of his people.

As Moses stood looking out from the mountain heights, he also could look back on his own life, remembering that 40 years earlier God saw the potential in him to become a great leader, although Moses tried to talk God out of it at the burning bush. And now with his work completed, he could see the potential for Israel's future and their new leader, Joshua. It was time for Moses to pass the torch to Joshua, just as the leaders of Israel would one day pass the torch to the promised Messiah who would come one day. Moses spoke about this prophet earlier in Deuteronomy ó one who was greater than he and one to whom the people must listen. And on this

Transfiguration Sunday when Moses stands with Jesus and Elijah in the cloud, the potential that Moses realized 1400 years earlier is being fulfilled in the Messiah, for this Messiah is preparing to make an Exodus for God's people from their slavery to sin.

God sees the potential in St. Paul's and in each one of us today. Having purchased us through the blood of his Son shed on the cross, God gives us forgiveness of sins and empowers us with his Holy Spirit and gifts. We are very valuable to God in our witness to other people and in our works of service in the name of Christ. Consider for a moment the piles of snow stacked around our parking lot. Someone could look have looked at our snow-filled lot and said, "Impossible," but God placed the right people in the right position so that the work was accomplished that made possible our worship this weekend. So God places us all in positions of service within the Body of Christ with our gifts so that he can use us to our full potential. But sometimes we place limit for ourselves as to what we are able to do because we do not see the potential within us, just as Moses tried to place limits on himself at the burning bush. But with God, great mountains of snow can be moved, and we need to open ourselves to the opportunities for God to use us at St. Paul's and within our community.

Moses died and was buried at Mount Nebo, but our work continues to tell others about Jesus and to serve our neighbors as we would be served ourselves. And so that God can use us to our full potential, God gives us his Word and Sacraments to empower our service. Moses could see the potential in Joshua and the children of Israel as he looked out from Mount Nebo, and God sees the potential for you and me and his church today.

But how can we be sure. We can be sure because God always keeps his promises. Moses looked back and saw being fulfilled in his time a promise that God made long ago to his ancestors. In our text today, God says to Moses: *"This is the land I promised on oath to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob when I said, 'I will give it to your descendants.'"*

If the success of the Israelite's journey depended entirely on the people of Israel, it would have never happened. However, it was based on a promise that God made, and God always keeps his promises. God's great love for his people, the descendants of Abraham, made this happen. It was entirely God's grace and love which made this happen, without anything of merit within the people of Israel to fulfill the promise.

In the same way, there is nothing but the grace and love of God that make possible our forgiveness and salvation. The whole Israelite exodus with Moses and Joshua to the Promised Land was pointing forward to an even greater exodus to be accomplished through God's Son, Jesus Christ. Out of his great love for his creation, and because of the promise he once made within the hearing of Adam and Eve, a Savior must come who would crush our enemy, the devil. And the Savior and Messiah have come in Jesus Christ, and he willingly stretched out his arms on the cross in fulfillment of God's promise to deliver us from our sins. Through Jesus's sacrifice on the cross, and by his glorious resurrection, we have forgiveness of our sins, the gift of eternal life, and the new life in Christ. God always keeps his promises, and your presence here today is the evidence of God's faithfulness.

Moses could see the people from the mountain, and he realized the potential as they prepared to enter the Promised Land. He also could see that God had not forgotten the promise he made to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob generations earlier. The promise was being fulfilled, and he had played an important part in God's plan. But it was Jesus who was going to fulfill the promise in a greater way through his own work. With Christ's work completed, God continues to work in us. God looks and sees the potential in each one of us, and he remembers his words that we are his dear children. Our privilege is to serve and obey his will. Yes it's good to be here. It's great to be here!

solī deo gloria