

"They made it possible" A sermon by Lee Ireland
Cathedral City Community Presbyterian Church
October 29, 2017 Twenty-first Sunday after Pentecost
Deuteronomy 34:1-12

Let us pray together: **Open our eyes to see your Spirit in our life. Open our hearts to receive the blessings you send each day. Guide us with your wisdom so that through us Christ may walk on the earth once again. Amen.**

About 6 weeks ago when I mentioned to some pastor friends that I was going to preach on this text about Moses' death, I got lots of questions. Why would I pick such a verse? It's on death. How can this be an uplifting sermon?

Well, I'm happy to tell you that once I explained to these folks that we need to value those that have gone before us and that was the topic I was going to preach on, they began to grasp just a little of the importance of these verses from Deuteronomy.

These verses provide an amazing story of our great God's love for God's creatures. In this case, one particular creature – Moses. Though God did not let Moses enter the Promised Land, God showed Moses all the Promised Land that the people would have to conquer. What is so amazing that God showed Moses the Promised Land? Mt. Nebo is 5,722 feet high today, probably about the same height as it was when Moses was standing there. From that height if I were standing there, I would not be able to see to the Mediterranean Sea and as far north and south as the passage describes. From the peak of Mt. Nebo, God somehow enabled Moses to see what a mortal human could not see with the naked eye. It must have given Moses great pleasure to see all the land that God would provide to the Hebrew people, the people Moses had loved and cared for over the past forty years.

I'd like to mention one other part of this story where God's love for Moses is demonstrated. Our Bible says that **He (Moses) was buried in a valley in the land of Moab, opposite Beth-peor, but no one knows his burial place to this day.** The Hebrew text actually says that God buried Moses. Some of the Jewish commentaries on this scripture explain that angels probably helped God bury Moses. To have God personally bury Moses further demonstrated God's love for Moses.

The part of today's verse I specifically want you to note is: **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.

Without the guidance of Moses and God, the Hebrew people would have died in the desert and that would have been the end of the story. Moses listened to God and God listened to Moses. Moses followed God's direction and led the people to the Promised Land. Moses' dedication to God and Moses' faith enabled the next chapter of the Hebrew people to unfold. Without Moses there would not have been a Jewish race or religion. Without Moses, our church service today just might have taken on a different form. We might be worshipping multiple gods – not the one true God.

Now, I make that statement just to shock you a bit. God would have managed to make himself known to us in some other manner if Moses would have failed. But Moses did not. He had faith in God and God's promise and we are here today worshipping the one true God. Moses enabled you and me to be in this place today.

Today is Reformation Sunday. As some of you know, this is the 500th anniversary of the Protestant Reformation which started when Martin Luther nailed to the door of the Wittenberg Castle church in Wittenberg, Germany his 95 Theses, which were church related issues he wanted to discuss and debate. However, through a strange combination of religion and government interaction, Luther's Theses started revolt. The Roman Catholic Church's authority was questioned, and new churches started. Churches were formed in protest to what was going on in the Roman Catholic Church. Hence, the Protestant Reformation.

Luther and John Calvin, the founder of the Presbyterian Church, are probably the names you recognize as leaders in this reformation. Without their leadership, we would probably be using the Roman Catholic liturgy in our worship today. Certainly, the history of Western Europe would be different without the Reformation.

Along with Moses, Luther and Calvin, enabled you and me to be in this place today.

As I said at the beginning of this message, we need to value those who have gone before us. We are thankful for Moses and for Luther and for Calvin. But let's make this thankfulness a bit more personal.

In two months, I will complete my eighth year as your pastor – and be starting my ninth. During that time period there have been many distinct people who have enabled you and me to be in this place today. Since today we are remembering those leaders in the Reformation, I would like to remember those from this church who have enabled you and me to be in this place today. These are folks who kept this church moving forward by using their God-given talents to lead, to be an elder or deacon, to serve on Session, to organize projects, teach Sunday School, and, yes, to give their money. They may have been at the forefront of the action or they may have quietly worked behind the scenes, but they all loved this church.

I am only talking about people who have made the transition to life eternal since I came in 2010. These are my memories. If I skipped someone, please let me know. I apologize in advance. Also, Kevin tried to find pictures for all the people mentioned, but there was one person I couldn't find a picture for. I'm only briefly commenting on each one in the interest of time.

Here are those who have passed that enable you and me to be in this place today to carry on the mission of Community Presbyterian Church Cathedral City.

OB Bakke – our designer for the front of the church and the cabinet maker for the kitchen cabinets

Kay Graham – the smiling, soft-spoken lady that sat behind the kitchen serving counter, who organized the kitchen and coffee hour making sure that all was in order so coffee hour would run smoothly.

Butch Haltman – fisherman and the top salesman for fish dinner tickets. The person who kept the building and grounds in order. Butch knew everyone in town and made sure the church's needs were taken care of.

Maxine and Clyde Hildenbrand – a couple that worked tirelessly for this church. Maxine in women's and children's ministry and Clyde the electrician who was instrumental in seeing to the building of the fellowship hall.

Betty Mead – Betty was a restaurant server who waited on all the stars during her career. A true servant, every Sunday she was in church, she stood by the coffee pot and poured you a cup of coffee as you went through the line.

Jerry Pettis – an individual who loved the Lord who was a welcoming presence in our congregation with a kind word to all he met.

Rena Rodman – I didn't know Rena very well, but the stories about her ability to teach the Bible have been related to me.

Bertha Rawlings – the best way to describe Bertha was that she was into everything. It took three people to take over her jobs when she passed. She once told me that she had saved a little each week from her grocery budget so she could purchase one of the brass chalices we use for communion.

Bob Stahl – a pleasant, gentle man who was always willing to help out where he could when the need arose.

Evelyn Woods – She made great chocolate chip meringue cookies for coffee hour. She supported the church and the women's group through her involvement in the women's group and other outreach projects.

Yes, these people, along with Moses and the Reformation Leaders, made it possible for you and me to be in this place today.

We are thankful for each and every one of them.

Last year, our stewardship theme was 'pay it forward.' We wanted people to understand that what they do while they are here on earth enables this church to move forward to continue to exist and thrive and serve our community. The people I have mentioned in this sermon have 'paid it forward' and have enabled us to be here today.

My question to you. What are you doing to enable the future members of this church to enjoy a thriving, God-centered, Christ-serving church? We're not all a Martin Luther or a Calvin, but today each of us, in our own way, can add to beautiful legacy of this church through our actions and contributions.

May God bless your every effort.