

October 29

Today we are going to spend a little time in the Old Testament and catch up with Moses at the end of his life. We know Moses, right? We meet Moses as a baby in a basket, a Jewish boy that evaded death as an infant because he was found and raised by Pharaoh's daughter. We see Moses grow as an Egyptian prince, struggle with identity, kill an Egyptian and run away, marry a Gentile woman, become a sheep herder in Midian and then one day investigate a voice coming from a bush that was on fire yet was not burning up. Moses took off shoes, stood on holy ground and listened to the voice of God, the great I Am, tell him that he was going to lead his people, the Hebrews, out of slavery.

Now, let's remember that Moses had never lived among his people. He went from Egyptian royalty to Midianite shepherd. He went back to Egypt to deliver a people that he came from, yet did not really know. And we know about how that turned out. He tried to get out of it because he wasn't a great speaker. God said he could get his brother to help him. He went to Pharaoh. There were plagues, 'let my people go,' hard hearts and eventually the final plague of the death of all firstborns and the first Passover because the angel of death passed over the homes of the Hebrews who had followed God's instructions to cover the thresholds of their homes in the blood of the lamb.

Then Moses took this lot, parted the Red Sea, lived through a bunch of whining from the backseat...when are we going to get there? I'm tired of bread, I want meat! And more...

After all of this living, all of this drama, all of this service to God, all of these years, we get to the end of an era. We get to the end of the years of Moses's life. And what an end it was. Let's take a listen.

Deuteronomy 34:1-12

Then Moses hiked up from the Moabite plains to Mount Nebo, the peak of the Pisgah slope, which faces Jericho. The Lord showed him the whole land: the Gilead region as far as Dan's territory;² all the parts belonging to Naphtali along with the land of Ephraim and Manasseh, as well as the entirety of Judah as far as the Mediterranean Sea;³ also the arid southern plain, and the plain—including the Jericho Valley, Palm City—as far as Zoar.

⁴ Then the Lord said to Moses: "This is the land that I swore to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob when I promised: 'I will give it to your descendants.' I have shown it to you with your own eyes; however, you will not cross over into it."

⁵ Then Moses, the Lord's servant, died—right there in the land of Moab, according to the Lord's command. ⁶ The Lord buried him in a valley in Moabite country across from Beth-peor. Even now, no one knows where Moses' grave is.

⁷ *Moses was 120 years old when he died. His eyesight wasn't impaired, and his vigor hadn't diminished a bit.*

⁸ *Back down in the Moabite plains, the Israelites mourned Moses' death for thirty days. At that point, the time for weeping and for mourning Moses was over.*

⁹ *Joshua, Nun's son, was filled with wisdom because Moses had placed his hands on him. So the Israelites listened to Joshua, and they did exactly what the Lord commanded Moses.*

¹⁰ *No prophet like Moses has yet emerged in Israel; Moses knew the Lord face-to-face!* ¹¹ *That's not even to mention all those signs and wonders that the Lord sent Moses to do in Egypt—to Pharaoh, to all his servants, and to his entire land—* ¹² *as well as all the extraordinary power that Moses displayed before Israel's own eyes!*

Well. Moses was one of a kind. He remains an icon of faithfulness to God. Moses was so close to God and God so close to him that even in transition, even when his time on earth was over, his legacy lived on. What God commanded Moses was eventually carried out through Joshua. The power, the commands, the story and the movement was always God, though.

And I think that's what makes Moses' story so special to us and so important to who we are as the people of God even under the new covenant in Christ. Moses was not particularly qualified to be the boss of anybody. Moses was not particularly willing to be a servant of God. Moses was not a born, nor bred leader. Moses was not an icon of virtue – he did commit murder remember. Moses was, however, swept up in the story of God and became integral to the movement of God and God's chosen people.

For reasons only God knows, Moses was the one. And I don't know the mind of God or have any extra text in my Bible that gives me more information, but I would like to just suggest one possible reason God chose Moses.

Moses said yes. Moses listened to God and Moses, eventually, did what God said to do. Even after some hemming and hawing and excuses, Moses did the thing that God wanted done. And even when it was embarrassing and took him to familiar places where he had to face a painful past, he said yes. And even when God took him to places that seemed to hold an impossible future, he said yes.

Moses was faithful to God and God was faithful to Moses. It's not a new story, but there aren't really any new stories. There is remembering the stories. That's really what we do all the time is tell the same old stories every time we get together just like at your family gatherings and mine.

But just like your favorite story about how so and so did such and such that one time, our stories about God's faithfulness are important to hear and tell again and again. It never gets old, all this God is faithful stuff.

So, that's what I want us to see and hear and learn about God and about ourselves today. God is faithful. And God wants relationship with us. And God is too beautiful, and too powerful, and too much for us to just take that casually (or God is too much for me to take that casually at least).

Sometimes we can look at the rough parts of the OT and wonder what kind of God lets this or that happen. What kind of God allows famine or war or genocide? What kind of God doesn't smash the wicked?

The answer, if we really dig into it and don't just leave the question lingering in the air, is: a loving God. If God went around smashing the wicked, then without Jesus, you and I would all be so much goo left on God's smashing shoe.

The kind of God who spent time with Moses is the kind of God who cares about his people. The God of Moses is our God who cares deeply and doesn't want to smash people. His nature is not like the Hulk.

You know who I'm talking about. Big, green, strong, angry monster who is the result of a mild-mannered scientist being zapped with too much gamma radiation. There is this moment in the first Avengers movie where they deal with the mystery about the transition between mild-mannered scientist and raging, green monster where Bruce Banner says, "Do you want to know what my secret is? I'm always angry." The story of the Hulk is usually understood as a normally mild mannered man hulking out when he gets angry, but that line lets us at least ponder that it's the other way around. Bruce Banner is merely an always angry Hulk keeping a lid on it.

Sometimes I think we picture God that way. Sometimes we talk in ways that seems to indicate that God's reputation in the world is that it is God's default nature is to be upset with us and just manages to let us live by being on God's best behavior. When we accuse God of being mean, uncaring, remote, unmoved, then we are most likely making God in our broken, fractured, hurting image. The truth as attested to in scripture is that God is loving and just. God's nature is peace. And that God's justice is coming...but that's coming later after love has its best chance to save us all.

This is good news. As people who live post-Jesus we get to live with the image of God as love a little more readily. But there is still something about the closeness of Moses and God that can help us to know our God better.

There is something about Moses' legend status as a servant of God that can help us connect with God's love today. Moses is one who spent time with God face-to-face. This is something unusual. It is unique and who in the world was Moses that God would sit with him? Moses was a guy who said yes day after day, time after time, embarrassment after embarrassment.

Do you remember what it was like for the people to see Moses after he had gone up the mountain to spend some time with God?

Exodus 35:29-35

"²⁹ Moses came down from Mount Sinai. As he came down from the mountain with the two covenant tablets in his hand, Moses didn't realize that the skin of his face shone brightly because he had been talking with God. ³⁰ When Aaron and all the Israelites saw the skin of Moses' face shining brightly, they were afraid to come near him. ³¹ But Moses called them closer. So Aaron and all the leaders of the community came back to him, and Moses spoke with them. ³² After that, all the Israelites came near as well, and Moses commanded them everything that the Lord had spoken with him on Mount Sinai. ³³ When Moses finished speaking with them, he put a veil over his face. ³⁴ Whenever Moses went into the Lord's presence to speak with him, Moses would take the veil off until he came out again. When Moses came out and told the Israelites what he had been commanded, ³⁵ the Israelites would see that the skin of Moses' face was shining brightly. So Moses would put the veil on his face again until the next time he went in to speak with the Lord."

Moses was up on Mt. Sinai with God, in the presence of Almighty God for so long while God told Moses all the things that the people of God needed to know, that God rubbed off on Moses. Moses absorbed the glory of God just by being in a certain proximity to the presence of God. This is amazing stuff. This is truly mind-blowing.

And it fits so perfectly into how we know God through Jesus and the ongoing presence of the Holy Spirit right here and now in Pana, IL in 2017.

Jesus was born, died, and raised to new life all to bring God's wayward children back home, back to the kingdom, the family, to bring us back into a right relationship – a loving, respect-filled, relationship. And to seal the deal, when Jesus went back to be with God in heaven until he comes again, God kept on sending himself in the form of the Holy Spirit. The person of God is promised to be with us. God's very own self, in a

portion of God's glory and grace is present with us as often as we ask, as much as we need.

This is amazing, yet so often we get so focused on living good lives and getting God to do what we want, we don't just inhale, exhale and bask in the proximity of our loving God. When was the last time we spent time with God and soaked in his glorious presence?

This is what I hope we can glean from Moses' story. It's not really all the miracles, the plagues, the wonders and signs. The thing that is so powerful about Moses is his relationship with God. They are so close that when Moses dies, God buries him with his own hand. Now, I don't know if that is a historical fact, but there is something so holy about Moses' death that scripture tells us clearly that God handled Moses' funeral himself. It was a special, tender moment.

And another story from Moses' life with God bears witness to their relationship.

We get this in Exodus 33:12-23, *"¹² Moses said to the Lord, 'Look, you've been telling me, 'Lead these people forward.' But you haven't told me whom you will send with me. Yet you've assured me, 'I know you by name and think highly of you.'¹³ Now if you do think highly of me, show me your ways so that I may know you and so that you may really approve of me. Remember too that this nation is your people."*

¹⁴ The Lord replied, "I'll go myself, and I'll help you."

¹⁵ Moses replied, "If you won't go yourself, don't make us leave here.¹⁶ Because how will anyone know that we have your special approval, both I and your people, unless you go with us? Only that distinguishes us, me and your people, from every other people on the earth."

¹⁷ The Lord said to Moses, "I'll do exactly what you've asked because you have my special approval, and I know you by name."

¹⁸ Moses said, "Please show me your glorious presence."

¹⁹ The Lord said, "I'll make all my goodness pass in front of you, and I'll proclaim before you the name, 'The Lord.' I will be kind to whomever I wish to be kind, and I will have compassion to whomever I wish to be compassionate.²⁰ But," the Lord said, "you can't see my face because no one can see me and live."²¹ The Lord said, "Here is a place near me where you will stand beside the rock.²² As my glorious presence passes by, I'll set you in a gap in the rock, and I'll cover you with my hand until I've passed by.²³ Then I'll take away my hand, and you will see my back, but my face won't be visible."

Moses was all for being on the move with God, but it wasn't the movement and the inheritance and what was in it for them that mattered the most. After everything that

Moses had been through with God and with God's people, Moses wanted most desperately to just see the face of God. Moses wanted to just come closer and closer to God even after all the time he had already spent in God's presence, after already hearing God's voice.

Being in God's presence, hearing God's voice, and obeying God's instructions or commands, all define Moses' special relationship with God. Closeness in relationship and divine outcomes – miracles, signs, and wonders – are all inter-related. There is no emotional closeness with God that doesn't lead to obedience and God's movement through our lives.

If we are close to God we are protected, provided for and always being prepared for living this life right here and right now.

So, I'd just have us to consider today...Do we yearn for God? Do we spend time with God and wonder what it might be like to just keep saying yes to God each day and to live out of the love of God that has been poured into our hearts?

Now, I understand that we are probably all thinking that we're no Moses, but because of Jesus and the promise to be with us to the very end of the age, we can be. We can be faithful like Moses. We can say yes like Moses. We can glow with the very presence of God rubbing off on us like Moses.

And as God rubs off on us, as the Holy Spirit dwells within us, we will be changed and we will have an effect on the world, the people, the atmosphere, around us.

As we close today we are going to sing "Holy Spirit" as a way to draw near to God in the hope that as we go out into the world today we will be glowing with God's holy presence!

Let us pray....