

“Standing on the Edge of Something Great”

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Ancestors in Faith series

I've always pictured Moses as larger than life. Maybe it's because of how he's been portrayed over the years. Do you think of Charlton Heston and the Ten Commandments - arms stretched out with the staff in his hand and the sea separated so that the Israelites can walk to freedom?

So, I'll be honest. This is a tough break. The good old adage that hard work pays off doesn't apply here - at least not on the surface! We're tempted to focus on the ending of his life rather than his life itself. I get caught up in Moses rather than on how God is moving the people.

Moses is standing on the edge - able to see the panoramic view of the Promised Land - the place he's been going to for many years. But then the reality - he won't enter it. We don't hear any backtalk from Moses after God tells him he won't enter into the land where he's been leading the people. We're told that Moses dies. But his legacy is solid. He's still the greatest prophet, the one who knew God, the faithful servant.

Certainly his life and leadership has been tested around change and flux. From the beginning, he was outside of his Hebrew community raised in Pharaoh's courts. He spoke up against the treatment of the Israelites when they were enslaved in Egypt. He protested and ran away to save himself only to encounter an angel of the Lord in a bush that was in flames but not burning up.

God put him in charge, but he didn't want to do it. But God assured Moses that he wouldn't be alone. God tells Moses to lead the people, but he has to try to convince Pharaoh to let the Israelites go. Can you imagine trying to lead through the plagues? Can you imagine watching as people suffered? Certainly Moses trusted God in the midst of it all.

Even after the Israelites leave Egypt, Moses is faced with people who are upset and wanting to go back to what's familiar. As God continued to walk with Moses and the Israelites, God was forming them into a new community. God made a covenant with them and gave them the Ten Commandments - not just a set of rules, but a way of life and a way to create a community God's people.

Even more than leading through change - many changes - Moses had to lead through transition. William Bridges says that change is situational, but transition are psychological. Think about that! It's really the transitions that are tough because we have to think differently. The people took time to mourn Moses. They took time to prepare for Joshua.

It wasn't an easy transition to leave Egypt even though the people were going to the Promised Land. Yet Moses was faithful. His relationship with God was strong. He put up with

a lot!

So I'll admit that I struggle with the idea that Moses only gets to see the Promised Land. He doesn't get to set foot on it even though he's worked his tail off to get the people there. I'm sure he had sleepless nights thinking about what would happen next. But he didn't seem to waver on the knowledge that God is faithful and would fulfill the promises given long ago.

If you're interested in the reason why Moses didn't enter the Promised Land, take a look at Numbers 20. It seems that God was upset either with Moses himself or with the Israelites for a lack of faith. Either way, I get caught in the "it's not fair" mode pretty easily when it comes to Moses. What's the big deal? Let Moses experience the Promised Land!

But maybe the Promised Land isn't a goal in itself. Maybe the journey is what we're supposed to pay attention to. Without making the journey with God, Moses couldn't have had the deep, close relationship with God that was so powerful in his life and so powerful for the Israelites. Without making the journey with God, Moses wouldn't have known the presence and power in such mighty ways. Without making the journey with God, Moses might not have trusted in God's care and steadfast love in the same way. Without making the journey, Moses would've been different.

For you and me, the journey is key. It looks different for each of us, but think about what you've learned. Even with disappointments and dreams that have gone unfulfilled, what has God taught you? How has your relationship with God changed? What are the moments when you've have to trust God even when things didn't go as you planned?

So as we consider Moses - his life, his struggles, his leadership, his journey with God - how do we see ourselves? Have we said "yes" to God fully? Do we believe that God will make good on his promises? Can we walk with the assurance that we're not alone?

And if it matters to us as people who want to follow God, then it matters to us as the people of God - called together to be the church in the world. What are the views that God is showing us? What's the vision God offers, and what will it take to get there?

That piece about change and transition is challenging for us. Certainly we've experienced changes in the church - in worship, in the makeup of the community, in how we do ministry. But we trust in God's promises. When people wanted to give up and turn back, Moses encouraged them to keep going with the confidence that God keep his promises.

But what are the transitions? How must we think differently about what church is and how church is? Is it about what we want or what God wants? If we're here to make disciples, then how do we focus clearly? We know God's call on us is to build the Kingdom right here and right now, and we see glimpses of it. Even today, we'll welcome people who are in need of housing. We'll prepare meals, and we'll talk to new people. That's a glimpse of the Kingdom, but we're still making our way there. And we have to trust that God is leading.

What Moses experienced is a powerful moment for us as we seek God's will. Rev. Dr.

Martin Luther King, Jr. Talked about Moses the night before he died. He said, "I just want to do God's will. And He's allowed me to go up to the mountain. And I've looked over. And I've seen the promised land. I may not get there with you. But I want you to know tonight that we, as a people will get to the promised land." King trusted in God's leading and guiding, even though he had been through more than you and I can even imagine. King didn't see the continued movement toward equality, and yet we're called to keep that vision of God's Kingdom in front of us.

I'm choosing to focus on what Moses was able to see, on what Moses heard, on Moses' journey - sometimes frustrating and uncertain, sometimes he was led to moments of awe and grace, and always God was with him.

And the thing is that people knew that. There was no one like him. Even though it might seem like he missed out on the big thing, what was it like to be able to see the Promised Land? To know that the years of frustration and being the go-between guy led him to a place where he knew they would enter. Where he knew God was faithful to what God promised.

I'm thankful for leaders who have been faithful, and we pray that who have mentored others to lead. Maybe they did it intentionally, or maybe they did it through their love of God and commitment to ministry. God is always walking with us, and God is always moving us to see God's vision - not our own. And it takes our intentional prayer and asking God to show us which way to go. It requires us to listen to each other and realize that God does speak through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Friends, our journey with God is important. Our journey together with God in community is important. As we seek God's vision together, I pray that we hold each other in prayer, hold our community in prayer, and trust that God is faithful to fulfill what God has promised.

Thanks be to God. Amen.