

Reflection for Pentecost 20 - 29th October 2023 by Megan Cambridge

When someone great dies—someone whose life altered the lives of countless others, and who changed the course of history in some way—we remember them. The whole country (it may not be an exaggeration to say the world) did that a year ago September when Queen Elizabeth II died. As she died in Scotland many more people here, than otherwise would be the case, were able to pay their respects. The news coverage was relentless as we watched the family arrive at Balmoral and then the late queen leaving to return to London. We saw scenes of her lying in state and then the funeral service itself. I marvelled at the seas of flowers and cards and the grief. For most of us she was the only monarch/leader we had known – a long life indeed. Even those not supportive of the monarchy acknowledged her life of dedication and duty and much was said about the importance of her faith. She lived her life in the company of God.

Moses wasn't a monarch on the world stage but he brought his people, the People of God, from the dark time of slavery to the land flowing with milk and honey. A land to call their own. Every time the Children of Israel woke up and stepped outside, they had Moses to thank for their land, their homes, their pastures and farmland, and their freedom. His life was a game changer. We are told – 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 Israel.

Moses didn't get to enjoy the land of freedom for a moment. He died, we heard, apparently untouched by the limitations and difficulties of old age. He dies, as he had lived, in God's presence, by the command of God, a gift from God to the obedient servant. Moses is even buried by God; the Creator of the universe provides this intimate and loving act to the servant leader. There was no fuss or ceremony and no place to mark his grave but he has never been forgotten.

We have been following the story of Moses (and the people of Israel) in our OT readings since 27th August. At eighty years old he was probably ready to pack it in, and live out the rest of his years as a shepherd (Shepherds as we know lead sheep to water and green pastures, they protect the sheep from harm and outside threats. The nation of Israel would need someone like this to lead them to their homeland). At eighty, God calls Moses to do an amazing, world changing thing.to be the instrument through which Israel experiences God's salvation.

The Exodus – the experience of the Jewish people being led from slavery in Egypt to the Promised Land – is the defining moment of the Old Testament. It is through the Exodus experience that the Jewish people come to know **who they are** and **whose they are**.

Moses, of course, is God's man for the job, going toe-to-toe with Pharaoh and demanding that he let God's people go. It is Moses who raises his arms for God to part the waters of the Red Sea so that the Jewish people could cross over from slavery to freedom. It is, Moses, to whom God gives the Ten Commandments to form his people into a nation.

Moses was a gifted, well-trained person, but his true greatness was his personal experience of and relationship with God. He understood his preservation and destiny as coming from the grace of a merciful Lord who had given him another chance. Moses had an understanding spirit and a forgiving heart because he knew how much God had forgiven him. He was truly humble because he recognized that his gifts and strength came from God. Important lessons we can take from the life of Moses.

Moses fulfilled of the prophecy from Genesis in which God told Abraham that his descendants would be slaves but would then be freed. In one of Moses' final speeches, he gave this messianic prophecy: "The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your fellow Israelites. **You must listen to him**".

The countless comparisons demonstrating the connection between Moses and Jesus is no coincidence. Moses was a saviour of the Israelites intended to foreshadow the true Savior—Jesus Christ. Jesus came down to earth to save humanity from sin and bring people to everlasting salvation and relationship with God. He established the new covenant, sacrificing His life on the cross so that we might receive forgiveness for our sins. Despite the numerous similarities between Moses and Jesus Moses was only human. Due to his faith in God, he did many amazing things, but ultimately, he was still a sinner in need of forgiveness. Jesus, on the other hand, is both human and divine. He lived a perfect life and defeated sin. It is through faith in Him that we can be forgiven and receive salvation.

Our psalm for today – the only one associated with Moses – reminds us that God is present from one generation to the next. God has given birth to the world, and God's time is not restricted to a lifespan. The Psalmist uses words and phrases to remind all of us that God's eternity contrasts with human transience. God is beyond the human scope of time, bigger than anything we could ever imagine, and God cares so much about each of us. God was there with Moses and all the people and he was there with Paul and he is with us.

In his letter to the Thessalonians, Paul is trying his hardest to be a good leader, following in the footsteps of his ancestors. A spiritual descendant of Moses and a young Jew, Paul's main aim as founding father of the community is to enable the Thessalonians to lead a life worthy of God. According to his letter, Paul's leadership is without trickery and deceit, selfishness and greed, and is full of honourable suffering, faith in God, gentleness, and care. Paul's expectations may be a little high, but he strives to teach and nurture the young followers of Christ in Thessalonica. He is raising a new generation, he is building his descendants, and therefore the descendants of Christ and of Moses. Perhaps if we can proclaim the gospel in our words and our deeds in our lifetime, we might leave our descendants with something better to build on.

That, is exactly what Jesus did – in such a big way. Jesus was able to raise up a new generation, a new spiritual community, a new way of living that both learned from his ancestors like Moses and left a transforming power and relationship with God to those who picked up his mantle, like Paul. Jesus' way of leading – of teaching and living and proclaiming the Good News was nothing like anyone had seen before Jesus demonstrated God's love in a way that would change his descendants forever.

Today we are still calling ourselves followers of Christ. The mantle of Christ's teachings, life, responsibilities, and authority have been passed from one generation to the next over thousands of years. And in each of these lives, in yours and in mine, as it was for Moses and for Paul, God is present, and God will remain so throughout all times.

What is it I am suggesting we go away and think about – well we are never too old to be called by God, we have never been so sinful remember Moses was a murderer and had openly disobeyed God in front of all the people and Paul had been a zealous persecutor of Christians – we have never been so sinful that we cannot be redeemed and that the grace of God exists throughout all time. We live our lives as did Moses and as did Paul in the presence of God who loves us. If we live our lives by the distillation of all the commandments into the two on which hang all the law and prophets - "Love God, love your neighbour." we may not be leaders who change the whole world but I believe we can leave it a bit better.
