

Sermon

Dikalosuney

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Bacon Memorial Presbyterian Church

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Our Old Testament scripture from Deuteronomy describes the death of Moses and the passing of leadership of the Israelites from Moses to Joshua, son of Nun as Moses' successor to guide the next generation into the promised land.

We have been following Moses as he lead his people, at times reluctantly, at times pleading with God to help him and the people, and I think we can all agree that Moses 40 year career as leader of his people was a very difficult and arduous one. The people argued with him, God at times disagreed with Moses as well and there were times of desperation and near death concerns. And here Moses stands with God overlooking the land he spent his lifetime navigating toward and he stands looking but then dies before the final leg of the journey is finished. This part of the process will not be Moses – this will belong to a future generation.

It must have been difficult to participate like that and then so near the “finish line” so to speak, be unable to complete the project. To see it and not be part of it...and in this scripture we are not told anything about Moses' demeanor or how he felt – we are told his eyes saw it, and the next we are told he dies. It is with great mercy that God presents this to him. Knowing in his old age, likely in a weakened condition, his body was not able to complete that physical journey so

Inspired by www.workingpreacher.org commentary on Matthew 22:34-46 by Raj Nadella, Professor, Columbia Theological Seminary; and commentary on Deuteronomy 34:1-12 by Vanessa Lovelace, Associate Dean and Professor, Lancaster Theological Seminary.

God brought him to this special spot, to this moment, to show him that his life's work was complete and would be carried on by another.

Moses was who God needed him to be. And Moses was in direct contact and relationship with God. Moses didn't question whether he was achieving a good living, did he have rank in his society, did he have the right sandals and robe, or persuaded by the political tensions – he was not distracted or deceived by the thoughts of the day. Moses believed through his relationship with God that he could do what he was being asked to do. We know at times he wondered if it was possible and the people were near a coup at times but at the last, Moses did what seemed impossible at the start and seemed unfinished at the end.

Our Gospel from Matthew returns to this examination of Jesus where the Pharisees and the Sadducees have been taking turns, as if by design, trying to trap Jesus. This time it is the turn of the Pharisees to test Jesus in the hope of trapping him in his own words and thereby demonstrate their superiority over him.

The Pharisees had positioned themselves as advocates of the people, even though some of their laws were at odds with the interests of many people of the day. As we know, Jesus has been interpreting the Law himself, but his ability and proclivity to interpret it with clarity, integrity and commitment to needs of the people at the margins made him a forceful voice and a threat to their authority and their popularity.

The Pharisees press Jesus in the hopes that by forcing him to admit that the greatest commandment is to love God, then they can claim they were right all

along and silence Jesus. If he refuses to admit that it was the greatest commandment, they can accuse him of sacrilege.

Jesus response hits them right where they are – Jesus makes it clear that a sophisticated and responsible interpretation of scriptures cannot be reduced to a simplistic understanding of the greatest commandment. Being religious cannot be compressed into a single goal.

Jesus agrees that this a great commandment but implies that there is more than the human-divine relationship. He reminds them of the commandment to love your neighbor as yourself – the horizontal dimension within our relationships- human to human and divine to self. These two cannot be separated from one another. It is impossible to love God without loving self and others.

Dikaioisuney – a Greek word that describes this relational aspect of our faith. Dikaioisuney – righteousness or love of God and justice – having a right relationship with God and with the people, including oneself. Righteousness and justice are intrinsically connected and are predicated upon being in that right relationship with God and with others – our fellow human beings.

I was reading in the NY Times this morning the current situation in Israel and Palestine. The ground war – urban warfare – has begun in Gaza meaning citizens are in direct line of the violence. They have been telling those in harms way to move South since the Israel army is coming into the North. Peace – will it ever come, especially in the Middle East? Can we ever be in “right relationship” there? This centuries-long conflict over a strip of land – seems contrary to what

the love is God is about. In fact, all war does and yet it continues – declaring that not just this war but many in human history and those yet to come, declaring religion as the source of their right to fight.

Sometimes that battle is not external – sometimes that battle is internal. We pretend on the outside to be someone we are not. Maybe for the sake of the world – maybe to save face in our families and just prevent conflict or maybe because we don't believe in ourselves enough. Maybe we question and try to be someone others want us to be. Are we a little broken inside? Does that make us not good enough? Are we trying to reach a finish line that was placed there by someone else or something else – like societal pressure to be something – to achieve something that isn't important to you. Perhaps today you are under some type of pressure to complete something or achieve something that just doesn't feel like you. This relationship with the divine – where are you at with that right now? Solid? Constant communication? How about human to human?

I like to tell the story of Michael Jordan. Most of you know him – some of you younger may not – but he as a “goat” in professional basketball – incredible player, amazing athlete. Broke all kinds of records, led his team championships – phenomenal. One day, he decided – I'm a great athlete and I love baseball so I think I'd like to try to play professional baseball...and you know what? He was terrible at it.

I am not an astronaut – I could never be. I am not knowledgeable enough in science, nor do I care to be, not fit enough, just totally not interested. The path

I have taken in my life is not traditional so to speak and yet, with my right relationship with God, here I am.

Do you have financial worries? It's only money. Worried about a job – you'll find one, or a better one – maybe not more money but nicer people, maybe something that you are more capable of doing. Relationships? They have rough patches, hang in there. Pray, read, and love – you will get there.

Dikaiousuney – loving God should be at the core of one's faith but is incomplete by itself. If one's love for God does not translate into love of self and neighbor or even worse makes you feel less in some way or prevents you from loving neighbors, it is can be a way to cover up our indifference toward justice for others or even hostility toward someone who thinks and lives differently than we do.

“Ro though my faith is not yours and your faith is not mine, if we are each free to light our own flame together we can banish some of the darkness of the world.” – Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks

You can't light your flame if you are hiding under a façade or a false sense of yourself – be you – be all of you, no matter what that looks like or how different than others – all the more – we can't all be astronauts and that's perfect because the world needs a (name names you see). Light YOUR flame..light in your time, light it in your way...and you along with others will, like Moses, lead us to a land that is filled with love for all.

Amen

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