

Sunday, October 25th, 2020

Reformation Sunday

Call to Worship

Leader: The hand of God rests upon this mountain.

People: We will be a haven for the poor.

Leader: The hand of God rests upon this mountain.

People: We will be a stronghold for the worn.

Leader: The hand of God rests upon this mountain.

People: We will be a shelter from the storm.

Leader: This is our God!

People: We are God's beloved mountain.

Prayer of Adoration

O God of reforming Spirit, your love is steadfast, your presence is near, yet you come to us in surprising ways and unexpected places. We come before you this day in this place to seek your word for us in and through our worship. Come among us, we pray, and lead us in and through your Holy Spirit so we may follow in the steps of Christ, your Son, our Lord. Amen.

Hymn 330 O God, our help in ages past

Prayer of Confession

God of all places, we confess that we are not full of compassion as you are. We are prone to forget what it is like to be aliens, to be powerless, to be vulnerable, to be without an advocate, to be without credit. Forgive our indifference toward those who need our compassion. Hear our prayer for the sake of your loving Son, Jesus of Nazareth. Amen.

Assurance of Pardon

L: Friends, hear the Good News! God has approved us as fit to be entrusted with the Gospel.

P: God has approved us as fit to be entrusted with the Gospel.

L: Friends, believe the Good News!

P: In Jesus Christ, we are forgiven.

Mission Capsule - Increasing Nutrition in Malawi

Due to fear of contracting COVID-19, people in Malawi who are already vulnerable because of the effects of HIV and AIDS have increased concerns about accessing medication and community support. Presbyterian World Service & Development- supported Ekwendeni Hospital AIDS Program (EHAP) has been supporting those whose lives are impacted by HIV and AIDS for decades. Acknowledging these increased concerns, EHAP continues to provide community health support through physically distanced workshops to help families learn how to cook nutritiously with limited ingredients.

Children's time

Hymn 453 O sing to our God

Readings

Deuteronomy 34: 1-12 Moses looks down from Mount Nebo

Psalms 90: 1-6,13-17 A prayer of Moses

1 Thessalonians 2: 1-8 Paul's ministry in Thessalonica

Matthew 22: 34-46 The Greatest Commandment

Hymn 759 In Loving Partnership

Sermon: The View from Mount Nebo

When Martin Luther nailed his 95 theses to the door in Wittenburg, beginning what we call the Reformation, he intended to push for certain changes in the church. As we ponder the need for re-formation in our time, we ought to be careful of consequences that do not stay true to the seeds that God planted in Jesus' ministry, but we also trust that the Spirit is working in ways not known to us.

Today, we encounter the most known name in the Old Testament, next to Yahweh, which is Moses. Moses was a strong, spiritual and faithful man. His strength was shown as he pointed his people in the direction of God's will. Over the years he kept their ears open to God and their faces turned toward their destiny.

He was a spiritual man. He was persistent in following the spirit that called him to live his life under a certain discipline and task. He was a faithful man. He obeyed even when he did

not understand. He held to the command. He obeyed the vision in Egypt, in the wilderness, on Mount Sinai.

And now today we find him on Mount Nebo. Like Abraham before him, and Noah before that, the figure of Moses on the mountain breathing his last serves as a good example of the fact that when God puts his finger on people, their troubles have just begun.

Here on Mount Nebo Moses saw clearly what God showed him, but he could not enter into what he saw. The poorest child of the people who entered into the land of promise had what Moses, who led them into the land, could never have. God speaks to Moses saying:

“This is the land I promised to your ancestors, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. I will give it to your descendants, there it is, but you are not going to go in.”

Many stand on Mount Nebo as Moses did and see a future, a future that many are fearful and dubious about. Many would prefer that things stay as they are, to stay on the mountain or even better go back.

At the turn of this 21st century, the G 8 countries, along with the United Nations, set development goals to address the alarming spread of poverty and disease in the world. Five years later, Stephen Lewis wrote a document entitled **“Race Against Time”** which pointed out the failure of that earlier commitment.

Today, we are looking to a future that might very well be disaster if we don't change our ways. It is no longer an academic issue for we can see for ourselves the way the environment is changing so many things for the worse.

Sir Edmund Hillary, the first man to reach Mount Everest, tells what was going through his mind as he stood on the summit. He said, **“I thought of Mallory and Irvine who had perished years before trying to make it to the top. I thought of the people who carried the supplies and I thought of what several team members said, we have climbed on others' shoulders.”**

Remember, when Jesus was speaking to his disciples about ministry as recorded in John's gospel he said, **“I send you to reap that for which you did not labor. Others have labored, and you have entered into their labor.”**

Moses labored to bring the people of Israel to the promised land, but he could not enter it. Those who did stood on his shoulders. We are living in a time of great transition. Some of us will stay on the mountain while others will go on ahead, into a future that will be unlike the

past. There are fear and doubt, there are danger and uprisings. Yet in a sense we would be like the women at the empty tomb who are addressed by an angel,

“Why are you standing here looking for Jesus? He is gone ahead.”

The view from the mountain can speak to us today. The God question might be: **“ Are you, my servants, both participants in my future and yet detached from it?”**

We know and we don't know, the future is God's time, that time in which our partial sight will become complete and we will know fully even as we are fully known. The Bible ends, as Moses did, with a vision, a revelation of things that are to be:

“A new heaven and a new earth where every tear is wiped away and there shall be an end to death, for the old order has passed away.”

The last sermon the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King preached was about going to the mountain top. He had a premonition about his own death and he was not sorrowful but was ready to go, for like Moses he had seen the promised land; he was sustained by a vision of the things that are to be, and although he did not live to see them he knew they would come. He never got to enjoy the fruits of his labors.

The justice of God is not that we are allowed to complete what we have begun, but the grace of God is that we are allowed to participate in what God had begun. We are Joshua and the Israelites going forward to God's preferred future. By God's grace we make a beginning and so the nature of faith is lived in its incompleteness. Each of us has the opportunity to begin on the journey from the mountain top into the valleys and highways, until we reach our rest in God.

Prayer: O God, strengthen our vision so as we spend less time looking behind and more time prayerfully being led forward by your Spirit. Amen.

Prayers

Loving God, on this Reformation Sunday we are grateful for the faith in which we stand. O God you offer to your people both comfort and challenge. We are grateful for your presence in uncertain times and ask for your guidance for the days and months ahead.

As Moses looked ahead from the mountain top to a future he could not enter, so we who are able to go forward pray for guidance. We pray for young people who see a rather questionable future wrought with trouble. Hear our prayer for them and for those who can especially in these times make a difference about that future. We pray that more people see the need to not only question but reform old systems that no longer serve us.

O God, be with your church, here and everywhere, that others may see people on the way to a future that is meeting your will for all. O God in Christ lift us up and carry those without strength. In your love restore to health and strength those that are sick and suffering. Be present to those facing death, assuring them of your love and grace, and giving them hope to pass beyond seeing you in a mirror dimly but afterwards seeing you face to face.

O God, giver of law and love may that love pierce into our hidden selves and let the light shine in, so we may hear a law spoken that is not a law but a link, not a commandment but a connection, not a rule but a relationship. We will hear and know you, and then we will love, in and through Jesus Christ who taught us to pray saying....the Lord's prayer

Hymn 565 Come, my way, my truth, my life

Commissioning/Benediction

God of love, send us out to love you and our neighbor, not sparingly, but earnestly, joyfully, abundantly. We go in the Spirit of Christ to serve and minister in a broken world. Amen.